

Occult Vienna: From the Beginnings until the First World War

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1. Introduction

The rise of occultist movements from around 1880, although not as powerful as in other great European capitals, was undeniably one of the innovative factors that made up Viennese Modernity. It also affected the cultural life in other cities of the Danube monarchy and continued to do so after the First World War. Nevertheless, until today occultism is neglected in the literature on Viennese Modernity and the cultural history of Austria.

This paper starts with a discussion of the historical, cultural, and social frameworks of Viennese *fin de siècle* occultism: the international culture of occultism, the legal and political restrictions within Austria, the religious structure of the Habsburg Empire, and the occultist infrastructure (associations, bookshops, etc.). In the second section, the life reform movement (especially in the form of vegetarianism) and spiritualism will be presented as origins of Viennese occultism. With regard to spiritualism, one important aim is to show that it was not merely about seances trying to establish contact with the deceased, but a religious movement with philosophical, theological, and social concerns, which was controversial in the Habsburg Monarchy for several reasons. In addition, it will be shown how Viennese “scientific occultism,” a forerunner of what later was commonly called “parapsychology,” emerged from the spiritualist milieu.

In the section on Theosophy, I focus on the circle around the Lang family and Friedrich Eckstein’s understanding of Theosophy. Afterwards, I examine the radicalisation of theosophical occultism by the coming into power of *völkisch*-racist and the influence of misogynist ideas, which led to the formation of Ariosophy.

A final section deals with the influence of Alois Mailänder and Johann Baptist Krebs (alias J. B. Kerning) on the spirituality of Viennese occultism. Neither of the two has so far received the deserved attention from historians of religion although they were pioneers of the type of intensive body-centred spiritual practice that became very influential during the twentieth century.

The religious thought of Mailänder, Eckstein, Hartmann, and other protagonists of Viennese occultism shows the influence of fringe Protestant theology in the form of Rosicrucianism, Jacob Böhme, and radical pietist mysticism. While there was a lively interaction between these traditions of unorthodox Protestant theology, contemporary liberal Protestantism, and assimilated Judaism with the occult currents, the dominant Catholic milieu rejected these forces of religious renewal within Viennese *fin de siècle*.

2. Cultural, Political, and Legal Frames

With regard to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the terms “occult” and “occultism” were used to designate different currents that could be found in Europe, North and South America, as well as South and East Asia at that time.¹ They comprised spiritualism, Theosophy, masonic high-degree systems, and Rosicrucian associations, in addition to modern and traditional forms of magic and other “occult sciences” that focused on hidden natural forces and human capabilities.² The beginnings of parapsychology also fall under these headings. Parapsychology started to separate itself as “scientific occultism” both from spiritualism and Theosophy and from modern psychology (which was also just emerging at the time) (Treitel 2004; Wolfram 2009).

Occultism was closely linked to other marginal cultural trends that were beginning to gain ground, especially methods of alternative healing (naturopathy, homeopathy, hypnosis, and modernised mesmerism—that is now called magnetopathy or therapeutic magnetism) and the experiments of the life reform movement (vegetarianism, nudism, rhythmical gymnastics, modern dance, settlement communities, etc.) that often had a religious dimension (Linse 2001; Bigalke 2016). To some extent the occultists were also actively involved in the social reform concepts of the women’s movement.³

1 This paper is a revised and extended version of my article “Das okkulte Wien” (Baier 2020). I thank Magdalena Kraler for her helpful comments on an earlier draft.

2 For an informative overview of the various emic conceptualisations of occultism in the German-speaking world of that time, see Maack 1898.

3 In the present paper I cannot address the history and current state of research with regard to the occult side of Viennese modernism (on this, see Baier 2018: 389-392). It complements my earlier research (Baier 2018), which focuses on the understanding of yoga in occult Vienna. In order to avoid repetitions, I had to sideline the main protagonist of this paper, Carl Kellner (1850–1905), as well as other actors and topics that I already discussed there.

Compared to other major European cities, such as Berlin, Leipzig, Munich, Paris, or London, occultism in Vienna was rather weakly developed around 1900. In my estimation, this was due to two main reasons. The first one is that the overwhelming majority of Vienna's population was Catholic, despite the increasing number of Protestants and Jews. Austrian *fin de siècle* Catholicism aimed at a Catholic restoration which itself had some modern features. One tried to build a traditionalist counter-modern enclave within modernity (Schweighofer and Leeb 2020: 12; Voss 2020). The Catholic Church offered an intensive ritual and socio-cultural socialisation, combined with strong doctrinal ties and—different from the predominant liberal Protestantism of *fin de siècle* Vienna—a pronounced attitude to keep aloof from new religious and cultural currents that appeared outside the Catholic milieu. Only very few Catholic theologians and journalists in Austria wrote about occultism or treated it in academic and public lectures. They rather damned it as a collection of dangerous heresies and emphasised the superiority of Christianity. The best example for this is the Dominican apologist Albert Maria Weiß (1844–1925) who was teaching in Graz and Vienna for several years (Weiß 1894; 1904).

Not only were spiritualists, theosophists, and people of Jewish origin with an affinity for occultism often attracted to the more liberal and modernity-affine views that Protestantism stood for, and thus converted to it (not least also because of legal benefits from the membership within a state-recognised religion) (Schweighofer 2020)—the occult movements were also in many respects “a religion for Protestants and their specific problems and issues” (Zander 2002: 531). However, this only partly explains the relatively low resonance in Catholic Vienna.

An equally important second reason was the state repression to which dissenters without a political lobby, who went public with their views, were subjected to, especially in the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Despite the legally guaranteed freedom of religion, there was no real religious equality. Religious communities not recognised by the state were not legally as secure as the recognised religions. The freedom to represent worldviews that were not considered a religion and/or did not define themselves as such was not legally protected. Both were harassed by police interrogations, bans on assembly, and sometimes even imprisonment (Schima 2020: 32, 44-45). The police and censorship authorities tried to control everything that was thought to endanger the prevailing Austrian state, social, and religious order. Indeed, Austria was a surveillance state that occasionally also interfered with the interests of the Catholic Church as, for example, in bishop appointments, but nevertheless supported its religious hegemony given that Catholicism was considered the most important pillar of the monarchy, alongside the military.

One victim of this policy was freemasonry, which was attacked jointly by the Catholic Church and the authorities. While not being directly related to occultism, the masonic lodges functioned as a gathering place for people interested in the occult currents due to their reputation as an elitist community based on an ancient tradition of initiation. In addition, the high-degree systems offered Christian-tinged or pseudo-archaic “Egyptian” and “Chaldean” ritual alternatives to the cult communities of the large churches—these were interesting for occultists, contributing to freemasonry’s intertwinement with occult circles. Lastly, the masonic lodges provided a model for the organisation of alternative religious communities based on a hierarchy of initiation degrees.

In the Habsburg monarchy under Francis II (1768–1835; r. 1792–1835), who feared secret societies of any kind, freemasonry was monitored and suppressed since 1793. Although the ban on freemasonry was lifted in 1867 in the course of restructuring the Austrian Empire into an Austro-Hungarian Confederation, police officials could inspect meetings of associations at any time—according to the Act of Associations in the Austrian half of the Empire—which made the founding of masonic lodges *de facto* impossible due to their obligation of secrecy. This situation led to the establishment of so-called border lodges in Neudörfel, Bratislava, and Sopron, which were located on Hungarian territory, and—although relatively easy to reach from Vienna—still a bit off the beaten track. Of course, the Austrian secret service infiltrated these lodges. The Habsburg administration knew what was going on there and who was a member of which lodge (Speckner 2014a: 46).

It was not until 1918 and after the end of the Habsburg Empire that a Viennese grand lodge could be established, which was joined by the border lodges. As I will show below, the police surveillance of the associations also hindered spiritualism, Theosophy, and so-called “scientific occultism.”

The diversity of (predominantly sceptical or negative) opinions on occultism circulating in the public is exemplified by newspaper articles that reported on the flourishing of occultism outside Austria, and especially in France and Paris—the phenomenon known in the study of esotericism as “French occult revival” (McIntosh 1972).

Extreme supporters of the Habsburg regime regarded this development as a threatening one. On March 13, 1894, a foreign correspondent named “H.K.” of the Catholic and steadfastly regime-loyal Viennese daily newspaper *Das Vaterland. Zeitschrift für die österreichische Monarchie* (Fatherland: Journal for the Austrian Monarchy) reported in his column titled “Pariser Briefe” (Paris Missives) on occultism in the French capital. The article describes France as a country blessed with goods of all kinds, but one that was prone to squandering its rich resources again and again. In religious terms, it had

the good fortune to be almost entirely Catholic. Nevertheless, its rulers had been working for centuries to weaken the Catholic faith. In the last decades, one had literally tried to eradicate it and to replace it with superstitions and delusions. “How many communards did not revere spiritualism, necromancy and the like. Ever since then, magnetism, spiritism, occultism, Buddhism, etc. have been on the rise here more than ever”⁴ (H.K. 1894: 2). To illustrate the connection between occultism and political violence, the foreign correspondent referred to the anarchist assassin Émile Henry (1872–1894) who at the time had just carried out an attack on a luxury hotel and was sentenced to death shortly afterwards. Henry, as H.K. noted admonishingly, had been involved in necromancy of the most sinister kind for years.

The spectrum of public opinion was not limited to such an anti-French position and hostility towards occultism in general. Other newspapers reported less biased. In December 1902, for example, the comparatively liberal Catholic *Grazer Volksblatt* (Graz People’s Journal), referring to an article in the London *Times*, informed its readers that the occult movement in France extended its influence as far as the Russian court (Anonymous 1902b). In Paris, there was a *Universität für Occultismus* (university for occultism) where one could obtain diplomas, such as a licentiate in hermetic sciences or a doctorate in Kabbalah. The main organiser of this institution was a certain Papus.⁵ The mesmerist Nizier Philippe (1849–1905) would probably also belong to the leadership of the occult university. First Papus and then mainly Philippe would have acted as advisors at the tsar’s court. The article is sceptical about Philippe’s actual influence on the tsar and emphasises that most of the rumours about this are based on gossip.⁶

4 “Wie viele Communards huldigten nicht dem Spiritismus, der Geisterbeschwörung und Aehnlichem? Seither sind Magnetismus, Spiritismus, Occultismus, Buddhismus u.s.w mehr als je hier im Schwung.” If not stated otherwise, all translations of the German texts are mine. I would like to thank Camilla Nielsen for her support in translating not only the German quotations but also the first version of this paper.

5 The physician Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), better known under his pen name “Papus,” was the most important representative of French occultism at the turn of the century. He had been a member of the first lodge of the Theosophical Society in France since 1887 and advocated the suppression of South Asian influences within French Theosophy. In 1891, he founded the *Ordre Martiniste*, in favour of which he finally gave up his theosophical activities. The *Université libre des Hautes Études* (Free University of the High Arts) was subsequently established as the order’s centre for theory and research. Within the frame of this occult “university,” the *Faculté des Sciences Hermétiques*, founded in 1897 and headed by Papus, was dedicated to the study of “hermetic sciences” and also of Kabbalah.

6 Both Papus and Nezier Philippe were popular at the Russian court at the beginning of the twentieth century and had direct contact with the tsar and his wife, with Philippe’s influence being more significant than that of Papus (see Hakl 1997).

In 1904, the *Neues Wiener Journal* (New Viennese Journal), which did not follow a clear political agenda, took up the topic of higher occult education. In a relatively detailed article entitled “Wie werde ich ein Magier?” (How Do I Become a Magician?) the anonymous author “Y.Z.” recommends to enrol at an academy for occult sciences for those interested in attaining occult powers (Y.Z. 1904). The whole article summarises and ironises the content of a booklet on occultism and the development of occult powers written by Theodor Reuß that was published under the pseudonym “Hans Merlin” (Merlin 1902).

In accordance with Reuß’ booklet, Y.Z. emphasises that modern occultism developed mainly in France and America. In addition to the *Ecole Hermétique* in Paris, founded and directed by Papus, the theosophical School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity in Point Loma, California is mentioned as a higher occult educational institution. As for Germany, the Sovereign Sanctuary of the ancient Freemasons of the Memphis-Misraim rite would fulfil the function of an occult academy.⁷ This system of high-degree Freemasonry had been introduced on the basis of suggestions from America, England, and France. Its high degrees would involve the study of occultism and the secret sciences.

Y.Z. also treats the practical side of occult studies, especially the exercises for training occult forces that according to the author are summarised under the Sanskrit term “yoga.” For this he, just like Reuß, extensively relies on a lecture by “the outstanding occultist and freemason” Carl Kellner held at the third international congress of psychology in Munich.⁸ For Y.Z. the fact that even contemporary occult schools and academies still deal with these yoga arts is a proof that mysticism is still flourishing within the sober scientific character of modern culture. With a wink he concludes his article emphasising that it should in any case have become clear that it is not easy and comfortable to pass one’s viva at an occult college and become a magician.

It is very significant that Y.Z. is obviously not aware that Carl Kellner was a leading Austrian occultist based in Vienna at the time (Reuß does not

⁷ Reuß promotes his own masonic order here. In 1902, Reuß, Carl Kellner, and Franz Hartmann (1838–1912) succeeded in realising the idea of an “academia masonica.” After having acquired the rights to establish the united masonic high degree systems of the Old and Primitive Rite of Memphis, the Egyptian Rite of Mizraim, and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in Germany from the English freemason John Yarker (1833–1913), they founded the *Souveränes Sanktuarium 33°–95° in und für das Deutsche Reich* (Sovereign Sanctuary 33°–95° in and for the Empire of Germany).

⁸ Actually, it was not a lecture that Kellner delivered at this congress but a printed booklet that was distributed there in connection with demonstrations of the “yogic sleep” by Bheema Sena Pratapa (cf. Baier 2018: 410–411).

mention Kellner's home country either). A good part of Kellner's occult activities, especially in connection with the Sovereign Sanctuary, where he was *Ehren-General-Großmeister* (Honorary Grand Master General), took place in Germany, not least for legal reasons. Obituaries as well as occasional newspaper articles and mentions in occult literature made his occult side a little better known to the Austrian public after his early death in 1905.

At the turn of the century, Vienna was far from having an occult academy. Apart from financial reasons (the German book market was much larger than the Austrian one), the deterrent censorship apparently ensured that Vienna, unlike Leipzig, did not even have a publishing house specialising in the publication of relevant writings. The Austrian publishing industry in general was poorly developed and most Austrian authors, regardless of genre, published their books in Germany. Thus, occultist books published in Vienna were rare, and also journals with an appropriate focus could hardly survive and only for a short time. One notable exception was the *Wiener Rundschau. Zeitschrift für Cultur und Kunst* (Vienna Review. Magazine for Culture and Art), which appeared fortnightly between November 1896 and September 1901. During the heyday of Viennese Modernism, it ensured the media presence of occult themes within the cultural elites.⁹

Specialist bookshops were crucial nodes in the occult social network. As in the esoteric bookstores of the late twentieth century, one could there obtain information about literature that was hardly known and difficult to get. Moreover, these shops were important places of religious socialisation (Sachau 1996: 51-56). There one had the opportunity to make first contacts with the milieu or to meet like-minded people, engage in talks and discussions inspired by the books on the shelves, or simply exchange scene news and gossip. No wonder that Franz Lang, who was a member of the *Wissenschaftlicher Verein für Okkultismus* (Scientific Association for Occultism) and also functioned as librarian of the large *Theosophische Zentralbibliothek für Österreich-Ungarn* (Central Library for Austria-Hungary) owned by the *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Wien* (Theosophical Society in Vienna), advertised his bookshop-cum-antiquarian bookstore for "Theosophy, mysticism, occultism, spiritualism," stating that visitors of his shop would be "most willingly" informed about "related associations" (see Figure 1).¹⁰

In 1908, Andreas Pichl (1868–1932) founded the *Zentralbuchhandlung für Okkultismus* (Central Bookshop for Occultism) on Wienzeile 8, right next

⁹ See Brigitte Holzweber's contribution to this volume.

¹⁰ Lang's bookshop was located in the centre of Vienna; first in the Singerstraße and, from 1897 onwards, at Neuer Markt. On Lang, see Hupfer 2003: 108. Unfortunately, Hupfer is not mentioning the occult orientation of Lang's shop.

to the *Theater an der Wien* then famous for its operetta productions (Hupfer 2003: 226).¹¹ Like Lang, Pichl was an occult activist (see below). He organised relevant events and served as president of the Viennese *Carl du Prel-Gemeinde* (Carl du Prel Community), a meeting ground for occultist of all hues founded by Franz Herndl (1866–1945). Pichl also owned the small *Stern im Osten-Verlag* (Star in the East Publishing House) in which, if only sporadically, occult books were published alongside other kinds of literature.

The modern freedom of association was protected by law in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Stakeholders like the churches as well as the occultists and atheists used this freedom to spread their views and strengthen their social base, but had to face harassments from state authorities. Despite inhibiting religious and political factors, the official associations and also the informal circles below the radar of the state authorities provided a space for occultists, their sentiments, ideas, and activities—which sometimes even gained importance beyond the local historiography of Vienna. Through global networking due to capitalism, colonialism, modern communication technologies, and means of transportation, occult movements were already able to operate fairly easily across the borders of countries and continents. Many Viennese key figures were connected with internationally operating organisations being well informed about the latest developments abroad. Occult Vienna is thus a chapter in the glocalisation of occultism.¹² Apart from this global aspect of occult Vienna, it was closely linked on a meso-level with the central European hubs of occultism, including Munich, Prague, and Budapest. For this reason, it is impossible to study Viennese occultism without taking these relationships into account. In the next section, the prehistory and beginnings of the embedding of this internationally networked milieu in the local Viennese culture will be discussed.

¹¹ Pichl's bookshop was supplemented in 1921 with a department of concert management, which also organised lectures of occultists in Vienna. Following Pichl's death in 1932, his wife who was Jewish and his son continued to run the company until Austria was annexed to Nazi Germany in 1938.

¹² The term "glocalisation" stands for the intertwining of global spread and regional or local specifications (see, e.g., Roudometof 2016; Seibert 2016).

3. The Roots of Viennese Occultism

3.1. Life Reform Vegetarianism at the Intersection of Social and Cultural Reform Projects

Around 1880, a scene of political opponents, religious freethinkers and artists emerged, in which the Viennese occult world began to take shape a few years later. Friedrich Eckstein (1861–1939), one of their key figures, describes this milieu in a chapter of his autobiography *Alte, Unnennbare Tage* (Old, Nameless Days), entitled “Vegetarier, Sozialisten, Genies und andere Sterbliche” (Vegetarians, Socialists, Geniuses, and Other Mortals) (Eckstein 1988: 105–114). They met at the *Ramharter*, Vienna’s first vegetarian restaurant, which opened in 1879, a cellar restaurant at Wallnerstrasse 7 in the first district, that is, Vienna’s city centre (Pack 2017). The number of vegetarians was very manageable at that time. According to Eckstein, these were “mostly young people, [...] students, teachers, artists and employees of various professions” (ibid.: 105–106). Many visitors of the *Ramharter* belonged to the so-called *Pernerstorfer Kreis* (Pernerstorfer circle). This group of intellectuals consisted mainly of assimilated Jews who, disappointed by the bourgeois liberalism of their fathers, were looking for alternatives.

These young men were dissatisfied with the liberal ideology, which they thought too individualistic, too indifferent to social problems, too cosmopolitan and too flatly rationalistic. They sympathized with the socialist movement, stood with German nationalism against Habsburg politics, and defended ‘new values’: nature, country, art, the new mythology and the *Volk* were the guiding notions of their movement, which declared for Nietzsche and Wagner (Le Rider 1993: 192–193, original emphasis).

At the end of 1878, the government dissolved the *Leseverein der deutschen Studenten Wiens* (Reading Club of the German Students of Vienna), the official organisation of the Pernerstorfer circle, and this led to the members meeting regularly at the *Ramharter* (Goodricke-Clarke 1986: 99).¹³ Eckstein, who was affiliated with the Pernerstorfer circle, grouped his fellow vegetarians into two camps: the “Socialists” and the “Pythagoreans.” This reflects a polarisation within the Pernerstorfer circle that took place during the 1880s (Maderthaner 1993: 767). The fact that this elitist youth movement could

¹³ The Pernerstorfer circle is portrayed in detail by McGrath 1974.

gather representatives of socio-political (“Socialists”) and cultural-artistic reform (“Pythagoreans”) around a table on the basis of vegetarianism is not surprising when considering that vegetarianism in these days functioned as an identity marker for all those who were looking for alternatives to the society of their time. As forerunner of the life reform movement, vegetarianism was a focal point of cultural and social criticism and almost identical with life reform in general.

Therefore, in the lives of their prophets, in their motives and arguments, in the form of organisation and in the structures of the spread of vegetarianism, all the typical characteristics of life reform can be found: the critique of civilisation, the idea of self-reform, the utopia of a backward-looking life close to nature in connection with a future-oriented social utopia and the salvific, almost religious motives, which ultimately were meant to lead to a solution of the “social question” [...] (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2017: 45).¹⁴

Among the “Pythagoreans” was the young Hermann Bahr (1863–1934), who then had socialist and pan-German leanings and later distinguished himself as the leading theoretician of the artistic avant-garde of *fin de siècle* Vienna, and the Polish Jewish poet Siegfried Lipiner (1856–1911),¹⁵ whose epic *Der entfesselte Prometheus* (Prometheus Unleashed; 1876) had caused quite a sensation and was appreciated by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Gustav Mahler (1860–1911), then like Lipiner just twenty years old, stopped by occasionally, as did the composer Hugo Wolf (1860–1903), who later shared a flat with Friedrich Eckstein for a while and who would take part in the “summer colonies” (*Sommerkolonien*) of the theosophically-oriented circle around the Lang couple (see below). Marie Lang (1858–1934), the women’s rights activist and social reformer, who was to play a leading role in the Lang circle, was also involved with the group at the time, as was her feminist friend and ally, the painter and writer Rosa Mayreder (1858–1938).

For the premiere of the opera *Parsifal* (1882), many members of this motley troupe travelled to Bayreuth (the Wagner admirer Friedrich Eckstein did so on foot!). In Bayreuth there was also a vegetarian restaurant where the

14 “In den Lebensläufen ihrer Propheten, in ihren Motiven und Argumenten, in der Organisationsform und in den Verbreitungsstrukturen des Vegetarismus finden sich daher auch alle typischen Merkmale der Lebensreform wieder: die Zivilisationskritik, die Selbstreform, die Utopie eines rückwärtsgewandten naturnahen Lebens in Verbindung mit einer zukunftsorientierten Sozialutopie und die heilsbringenden, ja beinahe religiösen Motive – die letztlich in einer Lösung der ‘sozialen Frage’ mündeten [...]”

15 On Lipiner, see Hödl 1998.

Viennese group could exchange ideas with other life reform-minded Wagnerians.¹⁶ In one of his major writings, *Religion und Kunst* (Religion and Art; 1880), Wagner had praised Pythagoras as a teacher of the meatless diet and thus triggered a vegetarianism boom among musicians and in general among his fans. The Lipiner circle to which Mahler, Wolf, and Lipiner belonged (who all visited the *Ramharter*) was an art-oriented offspring of the Pernerstorfer circle that emerged during the 1880s. Its members combined vegetarianism with a compassion-based religiosity in the style of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) and Wagner.

The “socialist” wing of the vegetarians, with Victor Adler (1852–1918), the later founder of the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei (Social Democratic Workers’ Party, a forerunner of today’s SPÖ) and his friend Engelbert Pernerstorfer (1850–1918), after whom the Pernerstorfer circle was named, a member of the first *Wiener Arbeiterbildungsverein* (Viennese Workers’ Education Association), combined their social reform projects with pan-German nationalism and a critical attitude towards the Habsburg Monarchy and the Catholic Church. Through them Austrian socialism got a life reform twist. Misogyny, anti-democracy, radical anti-Semitism, and the neo-pagan interpretation of pan-German nationalism (except sympathies for Wagner’s artistic neo-Germanic mythology) had no place in their idea of being German and seemingly played no role among the guests of the *Ramharter*. It was only when anti-Semitism gained the upper hand in Georg von Schönerer’s (1842–1921) German-Nationalist Association (*Deutschnationaler Verein*) and among the Wagnerians of Vienna that Eckstein left the *Wiener Akademischer Wagnerverein* (Viennese Academic Wagner Association), as well as Adler and Pernerstorfer broke with the German nationalists.¹⁷ From around the turn of the century the *völkisch*-racist occultism of Ariosophy was to become an important factor in the Austrian alternative religious scene, which will be discussed in more detail below.

3.2. Spiritualism

The second main force in the emergence of occultism in Viennese modernism is spiritualism. The practice of this almost global religious mass movement focused on the communication of mediums with the deceased. Spirit commu-

16 For Bayreuth’s relation to the life reform movement, see Schüler 1971.

17 For the Jewish make-up of Viennese *fin de siècle* alternative religiosity, see Schweighofer 2015 and my review of this study in the present volume.

nication took place in the form of individual experiences, private ritual gatherings called *séances*, but also at public events. Spiritualism made a promising start in the Habsburg Monarchy. After an interesting prelude in Romantic Vienna at the beginning of the century, the French teacher Constantin Delhez (1807–1879) introduced spiritualism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Delhez represented *spiritisme* (spiritism), the French form of spiritualism, which goes back to Allan Kardec.¹⁸ Delhez published the country's first spiritualist journal between 1866 and 1872¹⁹ and was the translator of the first German edition of Kardec's major work *Le Livre des Esprits* (The Spirits' Book; 1857) (Kardec 1868). In 1870, he founded the spiritist association *Nächstenliebe* (Charity) in Vienna, the earliest spiritualist association of the Habsburg Empire. The members of the association met once a week to study the teachings of spiritism and hold *séances*. The association was active for twenty-six years until the Ministry of the Interior dissolved it (more about this below) (Anonymous 1896a). It was the only long-lived spiritualist organisation before 1918.

The leading spokespersons of Austrian spiritualism were Lazar von Heltenbach (1827–1887) and Adelma von Vay, née Adelaide von Wurmbrand-Stuppach (1840–1925), the *grande dame* of Austro-Hungarian spiritualism (see Figures 2 and 3). According to Adelma (2010: 378), both were “long-standing friends” who corresponded regularly with each other. Kiesewetter (1891: 708) mentions that the two met for the first time in the early 1870s.

As a Catholic, Adelma initially rejected spiritualism, whereas several members of the Protestant family of her husband Baron Ödön von Vay (1832–1921) had already become practicing spiritualists. In 1865, the physician and magnetiser János Gárdos (1813–1893) pointed out her medial talents to her, and for many decades she then worked as a medium that received messages from the spirit world, especially through automatic writing. She was also active as a water glass clairvoyant and healer as well as a writer of short stories and author of books on spiritualism. Her spiritualist world-view is very Christian-oriented and influenced by Allan Kardec, whose *Le Livre*

18 Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804–1869), who became known under the pseudonym Allan Kardec, was a teacher and businessman. He came into contact with a spiritualist circle through a magnetiser in 1854. With the help of a medium (he himself was not one) he communicated with spirits and published the teachings received in a systematised form in several books that were translated into many languages. Today, Kardec's spiritism is particularly widespread in Brazil, where it has several million followers.

19 The magazine was entitled *Das Licht des Jenseits oder Blumenlese aus dem Garten des Spiritismus. Eine Zeitschrift für die spiritistische Wissenschaft und Lehre* (The Light of the Hereafter or Flower Picking from the Garden of Spiritism: A Journal for Spiritualist Science and Teaching) (see Kasprovicz 1879: 7; Sawicki 2002: 292).

des Esprit she describes as the “most indispensable part” of all spiritualist literature (Vay 2010 [1900]: 259). She defined the spiritualist faith in accordance with Kardec as follows:

A spiritualist is, in brief, the following: He believes in God, in immortality, in the divine mission of Jesus, in a life after death, in an intimate bond that connects the spirit world with human beings and makes possible an exchange between the two. The spiritualist believes that every human being is a kind of medium, unconscious or conscious, each one is in contact with the invisible. – Spiritism has also adopted the doctrine of incorporation [i.e., reincarnation] as a means of spiritual progress and moral improvement, a theory we already find among the Greeks, Indians and Egyptians (Vay 2010 [1900]: 260-261).²⁰

The proximity to Kardec connects her with Delhez, the pioneer of Austrian spiritism. However, apart from common cornerstones (e.g., the doctrine of reincarnation typical of Kardec’s spiritism), her teaching is independent and of a visionary complexity that is alien to Kardec’s theology. This is why I do not advocate calling Vay’s spiritualism a form of Kardecian spiritism.

Her belief in spirits does not only refer to those of the deceased, but includes a multitude of spirits that animate nature and the inhabitants of other celestial bodies. Adelma von Vay’s main philosophical and theological work *Geist, Kraft, Stoff* (Spirit, Force, Matter), which was published in Vienna in 1870, deals with the process of creation through which, in her opinion, God manifests himself as spirit, power, and primordial light according to arithmetical and geometric laws. Originally, the spiritual beings appeared as pure spirits through Christ, the life principle of the universe, together with a partner as a bisexual dual union. Arrogance and self-centredness destroyed the harmony with God and within the dual unions. This explains the demise of the spirit world. The goal of the development of creation after this fall is reconciliation with God and the rediscovery of the lost dual partner.

The first editions of *Geist, Kraft, Stoff* are said to have been brought up by the Catholic Church immediately after publication and thus removed from

20 “Ein Spiritist ist in Kürze Folgendes: Er glaubt an Gott, an die Unsterblichkeit, an die göttliche Mission Jesu, an ein Fortleben nach dem Tod, an ein inniges Band, welches die Geisterwelt mit den Menschen verbindet und einen Verkehr zwischen Beidem ermöglicht. Der Spiritist glaubt, dass jeder Mensch eine Art Medium ist, unbewusst oder bewusst, ein Jeder steht im Verkehr mit dem Unsichtbaren. – Ferner hat der Spiritismus die Lehre von der Einverleibung angenommen, als Mittel geistigen Fortschreitens und moralischer Besserung, eine Theorie, die wir bei den Griechen, Indern und Ägyptern schon vorfinden.”

the market (Porta 2014: 47).²¹ Adelma was eventually excommunicated on the basis of her writings and subsequently joined Protestantism, where she was able to live her supra-denominational, esoteric Christianity in an untroubled way (Vay 2010 [1900]: 39). She had never regretted her conversion, and years later she wrote: “I have been breathing freely ever since and can penetrate the spirit and essence of the sublime teaching more easily and better” (ibid.: 40). Together with her husband, she was one of the founders of the first Hungarian spiritualist association, *Szellemi Búvárok Pesti Egylete* (Budapest Association of Spiritual Researchers), in 1872. She was in vivid exchange with spiritualists from many countries.

The founder of Theosophy, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), who usually did not have anything good to say about spiritualist media, praised Adelma von Vay in *Isis Unveiled* (1877) in the highest tones as rare example of a genuine medium that used its powers to heal the sick and comfort the afflicted. “To the rich she is a phenomenon; but to the poor she is a ministering angel” (Blavatsky 1998 [1877]: 325). Because of her purity and goodness, the spirits of nature, with whom she had been in contact for many years, would have treated her kindly. Blavatsky’s praise contributed to Adelma’s international prominence. Her work as a writer and theorist of spiritualism, however, goes unrecognised in Blavatsky’s appreciation.²²

With regard to the history of Adelma’s influence in Vienna, Hans Malik (1887–1964) in particular merits mention. He led a spiritualist circle together with his wife Maria, who was a medium (Hula N.D.). Malik met Adelma von Vay after the First World War and she left him documents from her estate as well as manuscripts and books from the Budapest Association of Spiritual Researchers. In 1923, Malik founded the federation *Christophorusbund*, registered as an association. Within the framework of this organisation he offered not only lectures and spiritualist séances, which were called devotional celebrations or edification hours, but also courses that gave introductions to the spiritualism of Allan Kardec and Adelma von Vay. Completion of these courses was a prerequisite for joining the federation, which is said to have

21 Actually, the first three editions of the book seem to be lost. The earliest edition that I was able to verify was the fourth edition printed in Vienna: Lechler and Gonobitz (the name of the place where the Vay couple lived) in 1911.

22 A few years later, Blavatsky published an article on a crystal ball particularly well suited for generating visions, which Adelma had given to Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). In it she describes Adelma as “our very esteemed friend and fellow” (Blavatsky 1966 [1882]: 180).

had more than 5,000 members in the 1930s (Hula n.d.).²³ In 1929, Malik's book *Der Baumeister seiner Welt* (The Master Builder of His Own World) was published. It contains texts by Malik as well as material written by von Vay and is based throughout on her thoughts. Because of his religious beliefs, Malik was deported under Nazi rule to Dachau and then to other camps but managed to survive. In 1953, the *Christophorusbund* was officially dissolved due to spiritualist activities that had not been declared as the purpose of the association and ceased to exist (Constitutional Court Austria 1953).

Apart from Adelma von Vay, her spiritualist comrade-in-arms, the private scholar Lazar von Hellenbach who headed a spiritualist circle called the "Hellenbach lodge" or "Aurora" in Vienna (Anonymous 1902c: 7), is also still largely excluded from Austria's cultural, religious, and philosophical historiography. He embodied not only the philosophical but also the social-reformist side of spiritualism and is considered a pioneer of parapsychology. Von Hellenbach sat in the Croatian Parliament for seven years and also wrote about the social and political problems of the Empire (e.g., Hellenbach 1893). He was an adamant opponent of anti-Semitism (see Figure 3).

Von Hellenbach did not only write on spiritualism; he also investigated topics that were interesting for occultists outside the spiritualist faction. These included, for example, the astral body, which he conceived as a "meta-organism," the ether hypothesis, or a number theory that could be used to justify astrology (Hellenbach 1898 [1882] and 1887). He published his reflections in numerous writings up to the posthumous volume *Das neunzehnte und das zwanzigste Jahrhundert* (The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries; 1893), edited by Carl du Prel (1839–1899), which deals with social and political problems alongside questions regarding the philosophical underpinnings of spiritualism (Hellenbach 1893). In his utopian novel *Die Insel Mellonta* (The Island of Mellonta; 1883), released by the spiritualist publishing house Oswald Mutze in Leipzig, he sketches an ideal social order influenced by the early socialist theorist Charles Fourier (1772–1837), in which free love prevails instead of the monopoly of marriage. He had in mind a fraternal and united community, "without the excesses of capital and the limits of property" (Hellenbach 1893: 127).

Carl du Prel, the "philosopher of occultism" and advocate of German spiritualism, who hailed from Landshut (Bavaria) and lived in Munich, had great

23 Johann Hula, the owner of the website *Christophorus Institut*, which provides information about the *Christophorus Bund*, came into contact with this organisation through his father-in-law. In an interview he told me that he received information about the number of members from old members of the *Bund*, which was based on the numbered membership cards.

influence in Germany and Austria.²⁴ Being a figurehead of Austrian occultism, he should not go unmentioned here. His thinking was influenced by Austrian occultism as represented by von Hellenbach, whom he met in Munich in the summer of 1880 (Kaiser 2008: 53).²⁵ Du Prel's importance for Viennese Modernism was not limited to his function as a mentor of the *Wiener Rundschau*, to which he frequently contributed articles. He was an important point of reference for Austrian spiritualism and occultism in general and also a welcome target for critics of the occult world within the Habsburgian Empire.

Du Prel's interest in spiritualism, already awakened by his medially gifted wife, deepened through his relationship with von Hellenbach. It was the latter who introduced him to the Leipzig astrophysicist and spiritualist Karl Friedrich Zöllner (1834–1882), whose work du Prel strongly influenced (Kaiser 2008: 53).²⁶ Just like von Hellenbach, du Prel cannot be reduced to having been merely a theorist of spiritualism. He saw himself as a representative of an occultism in which spiritualism is only one, albeit important, branch. In addition, he dealt intensively with the theoretical understanding of the process of artistic creativity and thus acted as a bridge builder between art and occultism. Between 1880 and 1884 he devoted himself to the study of literature on dreams and somnambulism. During these years, he became the most outstanding connoisseur of German Romantic mesmerism in the late nineteenth century. In 1884 (dated 1885), his first major work *Die Philosophie der Mystik* (The Philosophy of Mysticism) was published, which critically continued Eduard von Hartmann's (1842–1906) philosophy of the unconscious and built upon sources from Romantic mesmerism. Hermann Bahr in his seminal essay *Symbolisten* (Symbolists; 1894) on symbolist art as well as Sigmund Freud in his *Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams; 1914 edition) referred to this work. In 1885, together with von Hellenbach, he attended meetings with the famous British medium William Eglinton (1857–1933) in Vienna, which greatly impressed him and in which he saw his “met-

24 The epithet “philosopher of occultism” (*Philosoph des Okkultismus*) is taken from a tribute to du Prel in the *Zentralblatt für Okkultismus* (Central Newspaper for Occultism) (Mader 1920: 456–459). For more on the life and work of du Prel, see Kaiser 2008.

25 Munich was an epicentre of German occultism at the turn of the century. The masterminds Carl du Prel, Albert Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929), and Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden (1846–1916) were active there (see Pytlik 2005: 142). It goes without saying that the Viennese occultists cultivated contacts with Munich due to the outstanding position of Munich occultism, with du Prel in particular becoming an important reference person.

26 Zöllner also played an important role within the occult career of Friedrich Eckstein. See section 3 below.

aphysical individualism” confirmed (Kaiser 2008: 60). After Lazar von Hellenbach’s death, as mentioned above, he published a volume with works from his handwritten estate (Hellenbach 1893).

In several cities of the dual monarchy, especially in Vienna and Budapest, spiritualist associations and informal groups sprung up in the 1870s and 1880s. The influence of spiritualism extended up to the highest echelons of the state. Empress Elisabeth (1837–1898) attended several séances. One of her childhood friends, the Bavarian Countess Irene Paumgarten (1839–1892), transmitted messages from the hereafter as a writing medium. Elisabeth said that she herself was in direct contact with deceased persons, such as the poet Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), whom she admired, or her cousin Ludwig II (1845–1886; r. 1864–1886) (Hamann 2017: 418–420).

Crown Prince Archduke Rudolf (1858–1889) saw things differently. Together with his relative, Archduke Johann Salvator (1852–1911), he decided to put an end to the fashionable “spook.” They conceived a plan to convict of fraud one of the most famous professional media of those days, the US-American Harry Bastian (1843–?). To this end, they were instructed by the stage magician Emil Gottlieb (1850–1934), a native of the Czech city of Brünn (now Brno), who worked under the pseudonym “George Homes” with his wife whose maiden name was Fey. “Homes and Fey” were famous for performing well-known phenomena from the séance room in their shows and explaining the underlying tricks. Competently prepared by the mentalists, the two aristocratic gentlemen attended a séance in 1884, which von Hellenbach, who was a great fan of Bastian, held with him in Vienna. The “ghost trap” snapped shut; the medium could be convicted of fraud. This event was, of course, reported in the daily press. In addition, the Crown Prince published his critical *Einblicke in den Spiritismus* (Insights into Spiritualism; 1884), in which he branded the spiritualist movement as a public danger and called for an alliance of the Catholic Church and science to combat it (Erzherzog Johann 1884: 92–101).

Spiritualism had thus received a heavy damper—at least in the Austrian half of the Empire. In addition, von Hellenbach’s compromise severely weakened the political left wing of the alternative religious scene. Even almost twenty years later, people remembered von Hellenbach’s defeat and its negative effects on spiritualism in Austria and especially in the capital Vienna. In 1902, when the sensational trial of the well-known German medium Anna Rothe (1850–1907) was reported in the German-language press, an article about “Die Geisterseher von Wien” (The Spirit-Seers of Vienna) appeared in the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* (New Viennese Daily) (Anonymous 1902a) that informed about the situation of spiritualism in the capital. Since the unmask-

ing of Bastian by the Archduke, Vienna had been as good as free of spiritualists, it was said there, if one left aside a few small and short-lived groups, which mostly originated in upper social classes: “The spiritualist clubs in Vienna have disappeared from the scene, and even the memory of them sounds like a fairy tale today” (ibid.: 7).²⁷

For the Homes magician couple, the affair was good for their career. Their shows attracted even more people than before. From 1900 onwards, they were able to further perfect the re-enactment of spiritualist séances in their Viennese *Salon moderner Wunder* (Salon of modern wonders). This establishment was advertised in daily newspapers and journals and was apparently quite popular within the wealthy public (see Figure 4). In the articles that have appeared about the salon, there are repeated references to the couple’s merits in clearing up the scams taking place at spiritualist séances. In 1902, they moved to the Kohlmarkt and opened Vienna’s first cinema auditorium as part of the *Homes-Fey-Theater*. In 1905, the couple received permission to show films there daily (at first still in connection with a kind of curiosity cabinet and shows in the style of the *Salon moderner Wunder*) (Heide 2002; Schrenk 2009: 10).²⁸

Organised spiritualism was not completely wiped out after the Bastian scandal as the newspaper article quoted above suggests. Small private groups continued to exist and even spiritualist associations continued to be legal in principle, although their central ritual, the séance, had fallen into disrepute and had to be excluded from the descriptions of the associations’ activities, as will be made clear below.

After the turn of the century, Franz Herndl continued the line of Austrian spiritualism/occultism that ran via von Hellenbach and du Prel. He studied law and philosophy in Vienna and worked first as a secondary school teacher, later as prefect at the *Theresianische Akademie* (Theresian Academy) in Vienna, the training centre for higher civil servants, and finally as a civil servant at the Ministry of Finance (Anonymous 1959; Hagestedt 2011: 209-210). Besides his career as a civil servant he was a writer and dialect poet with pan-German orientation. In 1891, he met du Prel and became one of his most ardent followers. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Herndl published the novels *Das Wörtherkreuz* (1901) and *Die Trutzburg* (1909) through which he made his spiritualist and social-reformist views accessible to a wider public (Herndl 1901; 1909).

27 “Die Spiritisten-Clubs in Wien sind von der Bildfläche verschwunden, und selbst die Erinnerung an sie klingt heute nur noch wie ein Märchen.”

28 The relationship between illusionistic magic, spiritualist rituals, and the introduction of cinema in Vienna would merit a more detailed historical reflection.

Of all the male occultists of Viennese Modernism, he was the most committed feminist. In his “mystical-social” novel *Das Wörtherkreuz*, dedicated to du Prel, he takes the view that the refinement of the human race is best made possible by marriages based on true love and free choice. The spirits that have been destined for each other from eternity would find each other most easily in this way. In his novel, he refers, among others, to the pioneer of Austrian feminism Irma von Troll-Borostiyáni (1847–1912) and calls for the right to divorce and the liberation of women from social and economic dependencies so as to make the free choice of love possible. In order to achieve these and other feminist goals, such as women’s suffrage in political elections, he advocated the founding of social and political women’s organisations, whereby, in accordance with his Pan-Germanism, he was thinking primarily of Germany and the German-speaking women of the Habsburg monarchy and other areas bordering on Germany (Herndl 1902): “Above all, it will be necessary to establish a federation to take in the girls of Pan-Germany, whether poor, rich, socially high or low ranking” (Herndl 1901: 106).²⁹

Herndl was also active as organiser and functionary of occult groups. In December 1907, with generous financial support from Adelma von Vay, he founded the *Wiener Leseclub Sphinx zur Gründung und Erhaltung einer Bibliothek für Okkultismus* (Vienna Reading Club Sphinx for the Foundation and Preservation of a Library for Occultism), which is said to have been theosophically-oriented.³⁰ In the notices of the *Guido von List Gesellschaft* (Guido von List Society) from its founding year 1908, he is mentioned as *Vorsitzender-Stellvertreter (Vizepräsident)* (deputy chairman) (List 1908a: 71-74). This society functioned as a Viennese melting pot of occult currents with a *völkisch* pan-German background and had good connections to Germany. List and his society are discussed in more detail in the section on Ariosophy below.

Herndl’s status in the *List Gesellschaft* was precarious. In his novel *Die Trutzburg* he sharply criticised the misogynistic attitude of Adolf Josef Lanz (1874–1954; known as Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels), who was an influential member of the society as a student and friend of Guido List (1848–1919). Inspired by Thoreau’s *Walden*, Herndl led a reclusive life on the Danube island of Wörth since about 1905. The island is located exactly opposite the

29 “Vor allem wird es nothwendig sein, einen Bund zu gründen, der die Mädchen All-Deutschlands, gleichgültig ob arm, ob reich, ob social hoch oder niedrig stehend, aufnehmen soll.”

30 Cf. *Neue Metaphysische Rundschau*, vol. 15, no. 2 (February 1908), p. 77; on the financial support provided by Adelma von Vay, see the note on the founding of the reading club in *Zentralblatt für Okkultismus*, vol. 1, no. 11 (May 1908), p. 530.

ruins of Werfenstein Castle, which Lanz and his Viennese supporters acquired in 1907 as the centre of their order, the *Ordo Novi Templi*, which severely disturbed Herndl's peace of mind, especially after he had read the programme of the *Ostara* magazine published by Lanz (Herndl 1909: 253-260):³¹ "Whereas I see in the freedom of woman [...] a salutary progress of mankind, Doctor Lanz-Liebenfels, as can be seen from his brochure, takes the view that the freedom of woman only amounts to the decline of every race" (Herndl 1909: 256).³² Herndl interpreted Lanz's decision to choose the ruins of the castle "as the starting point of his anti-feminist movement" as a deliberate provocation, especially since his novel *Das Wörtherkreuz* had sketched a vision of the island of Wörth as the "centre of a liberation movement for women and girls" (Herndl 1909: 257).

The list of members of the *Guido von List Gesellschaft* from 1910 identifies Herndl only among the ordinary members and no longer as a board member (List 1910: 386). Maybe Lanz's growing influence, which radicalised the society, drove him out of his leadership position. Whether—and if so, when—he resigned from the *Guido von List Gesellschaft* is beyond my knowledge.

Be that as it may, in 1911 Herndl founded the aforementioned *Carl du Prel-Gemeinde* in Vienna, which was later headed by the bookseller Andreas Pichl. This association can be seen as a deliberately less ideologically determined counterpart to the *Guido von List Gesellschaft*. It united "experts and interested persons of all directions and fields of occult science (as lecturers, members and guests) in a generous and liberal way in the spirit of the master [i.e., Carl du Prel] himself" (Mader 1920: 458-459). At the beginning of the 1920s, when the glamor of the *Guido von List Gesellschaft* had long since faded, insider Ubald Tartaruga (1875–1941) described this group as the most important "occultist community" in Vienna (Tartaruga n.d. [around 1920]: 46).

31 Lanz is also dealt with further in the section on Ariosophy below.

32 "Während ich in der Freiheit des Weibes [...] das Heil einer höheren Entwicklung der Menschheit erblicke, steht Doktor Lanz-Liebenfels, wie aus seiner Broschüre hervorgeht, auf dem Standpunkte, daß die Freiheit des Weibes nur den Niedergang jeder Rasse bedeute." Allan Kardec held the same view (see Kardec 1868: 74): "Die Frauenemanzipation folgt dem Fortschritte der Zivilisation, ihre Unterjochung geht mit der Barbarei" (The emancipation of women follows the progress of civilisation, their subjugation goes with barbarism).

3.3. From Spiritualism to “Scientific Occultism”

On April 5, 1896, the Viennese spiritualist association *Nächstenliebe* that Constantin Delhez had founded more than a quarter of a century ago was dissolved by a decree of the Ministry of the Interior (Anonymous 1896a; Anonymous 1896b). At the time of its dissolution the association had seventy members and two clubhouses. Several reasons were given for the ban of the association (Anonymous 1896b; Anonymous 1896c). At its meetings, experiments with spiritualist methods, hypnosis, and magnetism were conducted, which were classified as illegal healing methods. One woman allegedly became mentally ill because she was suggested in hypnotic sleep that her mother had been buried alive. Moreover, the attention of the authorities had been attracted by accusations that the association was exploiting its members and the spiritualist teachings would lead their followers to turn away from religion.

After this ban, which apparently led to experiments with hypnosis and mediums contacting the deceased no longer being tolerated by the authorities, there were no more openly spiritualist associations founded. In the year of the dissolution of the spiritualist association (1896), the *Wissenschaftlicher Verein für Okkultismus in Wien* (Scientific Association for Occultism in Vienna) was established, which consisted mainly of former members of *Nächstenliebe* who were committed to a stronger scientific orientation of occultism. The press quite unanimously held that it was a barely disguised continuation of the spiritualist society. At the beginning of January 1897, the *Neues Wiener Journal* reported that the officially-approved association had held its constituent meeting. The official task of the association would be “researching the occult and related properties of human soul life, cultivating their study and promoting the development of the unknown forces inherent in the nature of every human being” (Anonymous 1897a). On September 26 of that year, an article in the same journal entitled “Ueber den Verkehr mit Geistern. Bei unseren Spiritisten” (On Communication with Spirits: A Visit to Our Spiritualists) reported on a general meeting of the association (Anonymous 1897b: 5). Through the lens of ironic distance, it is reported that it was first announced that the governorship (*Statthalterei*)—that is, the representation of the imperial central power in Vienna—had rejected §2 of the association, according to which “psychological and physiological experiments” should occasionally take place within the framework of the association. Such spiritualist séances were officially dismissed as quackery. The second item on the programme would have been to read and interpret an article by Carl du Prel on soul theories, which deals with the existence of the spirits of the

deceased. Apparently, the only doubter in the room was the police commissioner present, the journalist reports:

The man gasped under the weight of the technical expressions that poured down on him, such as “transcendental consciousness,” “transfusion of spirits,” “supernatural perceptions of the astral body,” etc., all of which he wrote down conscientiously to acquaint his superiors with the secrets of the spirit world (Anonymous 1897b: 5).³³

In the discussion that followed, personal experiences in the field of spiritualism were shared, and alongside somewhat sceptical views in regard to the truth of spiritualism were presented. A defender of spiritualism said he would like to show some phenomena if only the police were not present.

Not only were the meetings of the association under police observation, but other events planned by the association were also subject to repression as can be seen, among others, from a report in the social-democratic *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Workers’ Newspaper) of October 15, 1899 (Anonymous 1899). The *Arbeiter-Zeitung* was not necessarily known for taking sides with the occult and the existence of extrasensory realities. But in this case the principle was the known dictum “the enemy of your enemy is your friend.” The article informs that the *Wissenschaftlicher Verein für Okkultismus* had organised a performance of the Budapest medium Therese Vallent in the hall of the *Ingenieur- und Architekturverein* (Engineering and Architectural Association).³⁴ Vallent would draw fantastic landscapes with great visionary power, which she called “moon landscapes.” This kind of trance-art performances were quite common at that time. “The blurring of the line between spiritualistic practice and artistic performance was a feature that came to the fore around 1900 when spiritualism became the subject of public events” (Sawicki 2002:

33 “Der Mann keuchte unter der Last der auf ihn niederprasselnden technischen Ausdrücke wie ‘transscendentales Bewußtsein’, ‘Transfusion der Spirits’, ‘übersinnliche Wahrnehmungen des Astral-Leibes’ etc., die er alle gewissenhaft niederschrieb, um seine Vorgesetzten mit den Geheimnissen der Geisterwelt vertraut zu machen.”

34 The *Deutsches Volksblatt* (German People’s Newspaper) also reported on the planned exhibition (see Anonymous 1899). The article mentions that Vallent is the wife of a member of the Royal Hungarian Opera Orchestra. Without ever having been trained in drawing, she would be able to produce “a strange kind of landscapes, rocks, plants and animals of another world, namely that of the moon.” She would draw very quickly and without ever having to correct or improve herself. Therese Vallent had a spiritualist background. During experiments with automatic writing she began to draw automatically. During the meetings, a “spirit guide” named “Ralf” was identified as the author of the drawings. The scandal of the police ban on the public presentation of her mediumistic drawing and her exhibition in Vienna made her famous for a short time. As a moon painter she toured all of Europe.

340). In Vienna, the police had prohibited the performance “in deference to the public” (*aus öffentlichen Rücksichten*). In view of this weak justification, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* sided with the occultist organisation and combined this with a swipe against the arbitrariness of the police in the Habsburg Empire: “The police are not at all rigorous about many other events, which are also violating common sense. May the occultists and spiritualists wander on erroneous paths, all paths must be free for scientific research – even those” (Anonymous 1899).³⁵

The anti-Semitic but comparatively pro-occultist *Deutsches Volksblatt*, in turn, published a detailed letter to the editor, whose author “C.R.” polemicalises against the criticism of the drawing medium on the part of the—as is emphasised—Jewish neurologist Professor Benedikt, who had published a book on hypnosis and suggestion and, with reference to this (according to “C.R.”), publicly denounced the medium as a profiteer who would exploit the good faith of the people. “C.R.” concluded that Benedikt would not understand anything about occultism (C.R. 1899).

It was not only the police who tried to keep the public activities of the *Wissenschaftlicher Verein für Okkultismus* to a minimum. There was also an influential professional lobby that occasionally turned against it: the medical profession. On June 10, 1904, a commentary on the association under the rubric “Notes” (*Notizen*) in the *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* (The Viennese Medical Weekly) massively questioned its scientific character and demanded the intervention of the responsible authorities with regard to certain public demonstrations (Anonymous 1904): “As far as we know, its members are as close to the natural sciences as an astronomer is to mining.”³⁶ Although one could not prevent them from considering occultism as a science, it was highly regrettable that the authorities would tolerate that the association organises lecture demonstrations of the medium W.F. in which she would demonstrate clairvoyance. This is likely to dull naive minds and damage the health of people who were easily impressed. According to a reporter who visited one of the demonstrations, W.F. pretended to diagnose diseases by holding the hands of test persons and be able to recognise the past, present, and future of these people. This was apparently one of the rare cases in which the association violated the ban on spiritualist experiments. The police

35 “Die Polizei ist gegen manche andere Veranstaltungen, die dem gesunden Menschenverstand auch nicht wohlthun, gar nicht so rigoros. Mögen die Occultisten und Spiritisten auch auf Irrwegen wandern, der wissenschaftlichen Forschung müssen alle Wege frei sein – auch die.”

36 “Soviel uns bekannt, stehen die Mitglieder desselben den Naturwissenschaften ebenso nahe, wie etwa ein Astronom dem Bergbau.”

seemed to have missed that. But the *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* was on the alert.

In view of the reprisals by the state and the medical profession, but also because of the low opinion the general public had of spiritualism, it is not surprising that the *Wissenschaftlicher Verein für Okkultismus* did not have a large following. According to the aforementioned important article “Die Geisterseher von Wien” in the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, the association had sixty members in 1902. But these would have carried occultism out into various social circles in which one would not suspect it. The author estimates that there could be several thousand followers of the occult in Vienna (Anonymous 1902a).

Starting in September 1899, the *Wissenschaftlicher Verein für Okkultismus* published the monthly *Mittheilungen des wissenschaftlichen Vereines für Okkultismus in Wien* (Notifications of the Scientific Association for Occultism in Vienna), the first Austrian journal for “scientific occultism” that according to its editors was a *Grenzwissenschaft* (borderline science). In the 1920s and 1930s, the term “parapsychology” became common for this kind of research.³⁷ The authors of the *Mittheilungen* did not investigate the field of the paranormal in an unbiased way, but assumed that occult phenomena were scientifically provable and that occultism constituted superior knowledge. A “supernatural world view” was to be spread through original articles, reviews, reports, and information about the activities of the association and related events. The *Mittheilungen* contained contributions on the research of spiritualist phenomena including ghost photography. In addition, suggestion, hypnosis, telepathy, as well as (with striking frequency) topics from the field of *Heilmagnetismus* (therapeutic magnetism) were covered. Emil Boenisch (1851–1913), a Viennese physician and magnetopath who was one of the representatives of the revival of mesmerism in Vienna, occasionally acted as medical supervisor or experimenter at public events of the association.³⁸ Probably, he was a member or close friend of the association and advocated the interests of therapeutic magnetism there.

37 The German psychologist, physician, and philosopher Max Dessoir (1867–1947) coined the term “parapsychology” as early as 1889 in the *Sphinx* (Dessoir 1889: 342). Within the English literature of around 1900 the term “psychic research” was used for this field. Only in the late 1930s Dessoir’s term “parapsychology” was introduced by the US-American botanist and explorer of extrasensory perception Joseph Banks Rhine (1895–1980) and subsequently replaced “psychic research.”

38 Boenisch was a friend of the painter and life reformer Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach (1851–1913) who lived in Vienna from 1892 to 1899 and founded the Himmelhof commune there. For Diefenbach and his commune, see Wagner 2020.

From 1903 onwards, the journal appeared as a supplement to the theosophically-oriented Viennese journal *Gnosis*. When the latter merged with Rudolf Steiner's *Luzifer* (Lucifer) in 1904, they uncoupled again and published the association's journal under the title *Seelenkunde. Mittheilungen des Wissenschaftlichen Vereins für Okkultismus in Wien*. However, the association disbanded at the end of 1905 and with it the journal came to an end (Anonymous 1906). A real boom in parapsychology in Austria did not take place until after the First World War, with the founding of several associations and a growing number of relevant publications.³⁹

4. Theosophy in Vienna

The Theosophical Society (TS) was founded in New York in 1875, with Russian aristocrat Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and US Colonel Henry Steel Olcott playing leading roles from the outset.⁴⁰ The society criticised the materialism of its time in the name of an original wisdom religion that had left traces in all peoples and religions, but mainly in "Eastern" traditions. Blavatsky and Olcott had met in the spiritualist milieu from which they adopted ideas. But the TS claimed to be able to outdo spiritualism by connecting it with ancient traditions of occult knowledge. To this day, the Society's programme is defined by three objectives: 1) the formation of a universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, sex, and creed; 2) the promotion of the study of the world's religions and sciences, especially Oriental literature (whereby, in some directions of Theosophy, the study of European occult teachings and an esoterically interpreted Christianity are more important than

³⁹ The following parapsychological organisations emerged in Austria during the interwar period: *Österreichisches Institut für kriminaltelepathische Forschung* (Austrian Institute for Criminal-Telepathical Research; 1921); *Wiener Metapsychologisches Institut* (Viennese Metapsychological Institute; 1923); *Wiener Parapsychisches Institut* (Viennese Parapsychical Institute; 1923); *Österreichische Gesellschaft für Psychische Forschung* (Austrian Society for Psychical Research; 1927). However, none of these institutions achieved the status of a registered association. The arguments and occasionally also the laws on which the state authorities based their repudiation had their roots in the discourse on spiritualism and scientific occultism in the Habsburgian era. For the history of early Austrian parapsychology, see Mulacz 2016.

⁴⁰ For the history and the different directions of the Theosophical movement, see Hammer and Rothstein 2013.

the Eastern teachings emphasised by Blavatsky and Olcott); and 3) the investigation of the hidden mysteries of nature and the spiritual powers latent in humankind.⁴¹

In 1878, Blavatsky and Olcott left America for India, where the new headquarters were established first in Bombay (today Mumbai) and then in Adyar, a suburb of Madras (today's Chennai). There the TS collaborated with the Hindu reform movement Arya Samaj and increasingly integrated Hindu and Buddhist concepts and teachings into the theosophical doctrine. Although Blavatsky and the Anglo-American leaders of the TS dominated the Indian members, the latter also knew how to use the Society as a platform for their own agenda. As an institution for popularising "Eastern wisdom" on a worldwide scale, the TS played a leading role until the 1930s.

In 1884, a scandal occurred that shook the TS to its core. The Coulomb couple that ran the household of the TS in Adyar published letters they claimed to have received from Blavatsky, describing the fraudulent practices by which Blavatsky had falsified letters that were considered messages from the so-called "Mahatmas." According to the official doctrine of the TS, the Mahatmas were masters of a secret Himalayan-based brotherhood of superhuman initiates who functioned as hidden teachers and leaders of the theosophical movement. One year later, a commission of inquiry organised by the London Society for Psychological Research came to a disastrous conclusion for Blavatsky. She left India, not only because her reputation was ruined, but also for health reasons, and travelled to Europe with the German-American theosophist Franz Hartmann as her companion. After having made stops in various countries (Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium), she finally settled in London, where she died in 1891. Olcott lived in Adyar until 1907.

In 1895, the TS split into two organisations, which from then on competed with each other. The numerically larger association was the Theosophical Society Adyar, which was led by Olcott until his death. His successor was Annie Besant (1847–1933). The Theosophical Society in America had its headquarters in Point Loma, California. It was headed by William Quan Judge (1851–1896) and then, after an interregnum, from 1898 until her death by Katherine Tingley (1847–1929). Further splits, which need not be mentioned here, followed.

The first official theosophical lodge in the German-speaking world was the *Theosophische Societät Germania* (Theosophical Society Germania) founded in 1884 in Elberfeld in the house of the silk manufacturer Gustav Gebhard (1828–1900) on the initiative of his wife Marie (1832–1892), who was a friend and pupil of the famous French occultist Eliphas Lévi (1810–

41 Cf. the definition of the objectives of the TS in Blavatsky 2002 [1889]: 39.

1875). The *Theosophische Societät Germania* was the second European representation of the TS after the London Lodge. However, it was dissolved after only two years due to the loss of members in the wake of the Coulomb affair. Its former chairman Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden published the monthly journal *Sphinx. Monatsschrift für Seelen- und Geistesleben* (Sphinx: Monthly for Soul and Intellectual Life) between 1886 and 1896. The *Sphinx* was launched as the journal of the *Psychologische Gesellschaft München* (Munich Psychological Society), an organisation similar to the British Society of Psychical Research that in opposition to academic psychology was integrating occult views and dealt with questions raised by spiritualism, mesmerism, hypnosis, and Theosophy. It became an important platform for high level occultism, which was also eagerly used by Austrian occultists. In 1894, the *Deutsche Theosophische Gesellschaft* (German Theosophical Society) was founded, which after the splitting of the TS became a branch of the European section of the Theosophical Society Adyar, which was led from London. From 1902, the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) took over the leadership of the German section of this society. In 1912, Steiner founded his own occult movement called *Anthroposophie* (Anthroposophy) institutionalised as the *Anthroposophische Gesellschaft* (Anthroposophical Society). He left the TS in 1913.

A German branch of the Theosophical Society in America existed under the name *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Europa (Deutschland)* (Theosophical Society in Europe [Germany]) since 1896 under the leadership of Franz Hartmann and Theodor Reuß (1855–1923) with headquarters in Leipzig. But Hartmann soon parted with it and founded the *Internationale Theosophische Verbrüderung* (International Theosophical Fraternity) in Munich in 1897, which had also been based in Leipzig since 1898 and aimed at uniting all theosophical lodges. Its German section was called *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Deutschland* (Theosophical Society in Germany).

Viennese Theosophy at the turn of the century is inseparably linked to Friedrich Eckstein and Marie Lang (1848–1934).⁴² The Protestant Marie Lang, née Wisgrill, was married to the lawyer Edmund Lang (see Figure 5). Together with Rosa Mayreder and Auguste Fickert (1855–1910) she founded the *Allgemeiner Österreichischer Frauenverein* (General Austrian Women’s Association). The “sacred secret society” (*geheiligte Geheimbund*), as Mayreder called the Langs’ circle of friends, met in their town house in Vienna to discuss the secrets of the Orient, the unity of nature and spirit, or the

42 For this and on Viennese Theosophy up until the First World War, see Zander 2007: 220–232 and Schweighofer 2015: 283–292, as well as Farkas 2003 and Farkas 2020: 156–159.

idea of reincarnation while enjoying vegetarian food (Schweighofer 2015: 290-291). Several contemporary witnesses confirm the central position that Marie Lang held in this circle. It would be too much to call the group a theosophical community *sensu stricto*, although Theosophy was a main topic of conversation given Marie Lang's enthusiasm for it. Rudolf Steiner, who participated in this circle in 1889/90, remembers:

After my return to Vienna (1889) I was allowed to spend much time in a circle of people held together by a woman whose mystical-theosophical state of mind made a deep impression on all participants of the circle [...] Marie Lang [...]. Theosophy, which had started from H. P. Blavatsky, had penetrated this circle. Franz Hartmann, who became famous in wide circles through his numerous works and through his relations with H. P. Blavatsky, also brought his Theosophy into this circle. [...] The architects, writers, and other personalities I met there would probably not have been interested in Theosophy taught by Franz Hartmann if Marie Lang had not taken some interest in it (cited in Bock 1990 [1961]: 81).⁴³

The highlight of social gatherings within the circle were the group sojourns at the Bellevue castle on the Cobenzl hill above Grinzing, rented by the Lang couple for themselves and their children and friends of the house (Eckstein 1988: 184-185). The first one took place in the summer of 1888. Friedrich Eckstein called these gatherings "our summer colony" (*unsere Sommerkolonie*) thus connecting the gatherings to the life reform concept of alternative "colonies." According to his description, the core group of this "colony" consisted of the Lang family, Eckstein himself, his friend, the architect Julius Mayreder (1860–1911), and the composer Hugo Wolf. Soon the diplomat Carl Polycarp zu Leiningen-Billingheim (1860–1899), a friend of Eckstein and committed theosophist, joined them. Another theosophist who often visited the castle during these summer months and lived there for some time was Franz Hartmann, who in turn attracted "visitors of both sexes from all over the world" (Eckstein 1988: 185). Finally, the painter, writer, and feminist Rosa Mayreder, who was related by marriage to Julius Mayreder and was

43 "Nach der Rückkehr nach Wien (1889) durfte ich viel in einem Kreise von Menschen verkehren, der von einer Frau zusammengehalten wurde, deren mystisch-theosophische Seelenverfassung auf alle Teilnehmer des Kreises einen tiefen Eindruck machte [...] Marie Lang [...]. In diesen Kreis war die Theosophie gedrungen, die von H. P. Blavatsky ausgegangen war. Franz Hartmann, der durch seine zahlreichen Werke und durch seine Beziehungen zu H. P. Blavatsky in weiten Kreisen berühmt geworden ist, hat auch in diesen Kreis seine Theosophie hineingebracht. [...] Die Architekten, Literaten und sonstigen Persönlichkeiten, die ich dort traf, hätten sich wohl kaum für die Theosophie, die von Franz Hartmann vermittelt wurde, interessiert, wenn nicht Marie Lang einigen Anteil an ihr genommen hätte."

a friend of Eckstein and the Langs, was a regular visitor. She worked at the “summer colony” with Wolf on the libretto to his opera *Der Corregidor*.

Eckstein, who already appeared above as a key witness for the vegetarian life reform milieu in Vienna, was introduced to the circle of the Langs by his friend Hugo Wolf in 1887. “Mac Eck,” as his friends called him, was a co-owner of his father’s paper mill, belonged to the Jewish upper middle class, was a pupil and private secretary of the composer Anton Bruckner (1824–1896), and a friend of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) from his youth (see Figure 6). Eckstein stood out as a columnist, writer, and patron of the arts, owned an extensive library and had the reputation of being a polymath whose encyclopaedic knowledge was beyond the reach of anyone in Vienna in his day (Mulot-Déri 1988). Many people gratefully took advantage of Eckstein’s profound erudition and occult knowledge, including Rudolf Steiner, who had exchanges with him during his time in Vienna and for some time thereafter.⁴⁴

Eckstein’s interest in occult themes took on a new shape in the early 1880s. At this time he became friends with the Viennese mathematician Oskar Simony (1852–1915), who was influenced by the theories of the above-mentioned physicist and spiritist Friedrich Zöllner, a friend of Lazar von Hellenbach. Zöllner believed that the phenomena occurring during spiritualist séances indicated the existence of a fourth spatial dimension and could be explained by it. Simony and Eckstein made direct contact with von Hellenbach and thus were in touch with the philosophical and social-reformist spiritualism of the Habsburg Empire. Eckstein’s scepticism towards the spiritualist media and their séances was not dispelled by these acquaintances.

He would probably have turned away from occultism because of his doubts about spiritualism had he not been made aware of the TS by the physicist Lord Rayleigh (1842–1919) (Eckstein 1988: 69). After his interest was piqued, he tried to meet the leaders of the TS. This apparently resulted in meeting Franz Hartmann who, shortly after returning to Europe from India with Blavatsky, lived with Eckstein in Vienna for almost a year (*ibid.*: 185). He also met the Gebhards and made friends with one of their sons, Arthur

44 On this, cf. Binder 2009: 119. Binder refers to letters of Steiner in which the latter mentions that Eckstein and Hartmann introduced him into Alfred Percy Sinnett’s (1840–1921) *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) and Mabel Collins’ (1851–1927) *Light on the Path* (1885). As *Light on the Path* was then considered to be a major source of practical theosophical spirituality, and Eckstein interpreted *Esoteric Buddhism* as prime example of theosophical mysticism, this indicates that Steiner’s early encounter with Theosophy introduced him into the Austro-Hungarian and especially Viennese understanding of Theosophy as above all practical mysticism that goes well with Protestant mysticism in the tradition of Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) and the Rosicrucians. Eckstein’s interpretation of *Esoteric Buddhism* is discussed later in this paper.

Gebhard (1855–1944), who was an active member of the theosophical movement.

In early 1887, Eckstein visited Blavatsky for several days in Ostende. On this occasion she presented him with a deed of foundation for the establishment of a theosophical lodge in Vienna and a golden rose cross. The latter suggests that Blavatsky had come to know and appreciate Eckstein's knowledge of Rosicrucianism and his proclivity towards this alternative-religious direction of Protestantism in his conversations with him. In the same year, the first official theosophical lodge in Austria opened its doors with Eckstein as president and, as already mentioned above, Carl Polycarp zu Leiningen-Billingheim as secretary.

The latter was an important figure in early Viennese Theosophy. There is confusion about his identity as there were actually two counts of Leiningen-Billingheim called Carl. Helmut Zander and others identified him with Carl Wenzeslaus (1823–1900), the Lord Steward of the Grand Duchy of Baden (Zander 2007: 222). Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the member of the noble family Leiningen-Billingheim who was involved in the establishment of Viennese Theosophy was not Carl Wenzeslaus, but his son, Carl Polykarp (1860–1899), who worked as an attaché at the royal Bavarian embassy in Vienna. In his autobiography Eckstein calls Carl zu Leiningen-Billingheim who participated in the first “summer colony” at the Bellevue castle in 1888, and was involved in Viennese Theosophy, a “young diplomat.” At this time Carl Wenzeslaus was already sixty-four years old and was not employed in a diplomatic corps.

Carl Polycarp was a second-generation occultist. His father still got to know Johann Baptist Krebs (alias J. B. Kerning; 1774–1851) whose work later became a point of reference for Habsburgian occultism (see below). Carl Wenzeslaus obviously transmitted his knowledge on the teachings of Kerning to Carl Polycarp. Both father and son were members of the *Psychologische Gesellschaft München* that was strongly influenced by Carl du Prel's occultism.⁴⁵ A manuscript delivered in the Hübbe-Schleiden estate proves that Carl Polycarp gave a knowledgeable talk about Kerning at this society in 1887.⁴⁶

Eckstein's Viennese lodge was involved in the foundation of the first theosophical association in Prague: “It was Baron Leonhardi who brought Friedrich Eckstein and Count Polycarp of Leiningen-Billingheim to Prague in 1891 and founded the *Loge zum Blauen Stern* (Blue Star Lodge) in Meyrink's

⁴⁵ See the membership list of the *Psychologische Gesellschaft München* of June 1, 1887 in Kaiser 2008: 66. I would like to thank Rolf Speckner for this reference.

⁴⁶ My sincere thanks again go to Rolf Speckner for informing me about the existence of this manuscript.

apartment” (Binder 2009: 188). Via letters and meetings, the Viennese theosophists monitored the activities of the members of the Blue Star Lodge, especially the spiritual practices they experimented with.

The first Viennese theosophical lodge existed at least until 1896, after which its traces are lost. During this period, it apparently had to temporarily suspend its official activities since theosophical lodges were regarded as disguised Masonic lodges and were banned. Franz Hartmann wrote on Austrian Theosophy in 1893:

For certain reasons, which are not to be discussed here, the existence of these societies, which were thought to be a kind of “freemasonry,” was not legally permitted in Austria and Russia. The members there are therefore to be considered only as members of the European section who are currently in the cities concerned (Hartmann 1893: 64-65).⁴⁷

Probably in the early 1890s, Eckstein became a freemason. We know for certain that he was a member of the border lodge *Zukunft* (Future) in Bratislava, where he received the rank of Master Mason in 1898. Apparently, he also came into contact with high-degree systems during his travels to England and North America (Speckner 2014a: 46).

There are hardly any statements about Eckstein’s understanding of Theosophy that go beyond the anecdotal. In January 1888, however, he reviewed in the *Sphinx* the book *Esoteric Buddhism* written by the journalist and theosophical author Alfred Percy Sinnett, the fourth edition of which was published in 1887 (Eckstein 1888).⁴⁸ This book is one of the most important theosophical publications of the 1880s. It stands at the beginning of systematisation of the theosophical teachings after the “Eastern turn,” that is, the turn towards South Asian religions, which would finally lead to Blavatsky’s second main work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), which had not yet been published at the time of Eckstein’s review of *Esoteric Buddhism*. In the said review Eckstein thus dealt with the current state of theosophical theory-formation.

The title of his review, “Die esoterische Lehre in indischer Fassung” (The Esoteric Doctrine in Its Indian Version) was based on the title of the German

⁴⁷ “Aus gewissen Gründen, die hier nicht zu erörtern sind, wurde in Österreich und Russland dem Bestehen dieser Gesellschaften, hinter denen man eine Art von ‘Freimaurerei’ witterte, nicht die gesetzliche Bewilligung erteilt. Die dort befindlichen Mitglieder sind deshalb nur als Mitglieder der europäischen Sektion, welche sich zur Zeit in den betreffenden Städten aufhalten, zu betrachten.”

⁴⁸ As Eckstein correctly notes, Sinnett’s book had been available since 1884 in a German translation titled *Die Esoterische Lehre oder Geheimbuddhismus*. With regard to the German translation of theosophical terms Eckstein goes with the German version of 1884.

translation and corresponded to Sinnett's and Blavatsky's understanding, who likewise did not relate the title *Esoteric Buddhism* to Buddhism as a particular religion or a particular current within Buddhism, but rather conceptualised it as a superior Eastern articulation of the universal wisdom religion.

Eckstein did not think of uncritically accepting Sinnett's concept of esoteric Buddhism and did not propagate it as higher wisdom in the literal sense. Rather, he showed that *Esoteric Buddhism* was in need of interpretation and used non-theosophical points of view for its exegesis. He read the book as a work of mysticism, his concept of mysticism being influenced by a certain line of Protestant theology. In the very first paragraph of his essay he explained that mysticism was the "ancient doctrine" of "the 'flaming morning star' of inner enlightenment," which the God seekers of all peoples and times would follow. The mystics are called born-again, who with their baptism would experience the "birth of the 'Son of Man'" and receive a new cognitive faculty that would allow them to recognise not only the outward appearance of things, but their "inner 'signature'" (Eckstein 1888: 57).

Eckstein sometimes puts the words "morning star," "inner enlightenment," "rebirth," "son of man," "baptism," and "signature" in quotation marks, to indicate that they are taken from a different, that is, non-theosophical context. Indeed, this vocabulary does not refer to Blavatsky, but to the old Protestant theosophy in the line of Paracelsus (1493–1541), Böhme, and their pupils, which was used by Eckstein to characterise an attitude found in all religions and at all times, namely mysticism.⁴⁹

More than a quarter of a century later he would with remarkable sympathy describe the theology of the Bohemian Brethren with the same terms with which he explained the term "mysticism" in the review of *Esoteric Buddhism* (Eckstein 1915: 3–4). In a row with the Waldensians, Anabaptists, and Quakers, the Bohemian Brethren and Comenius (1592–1670) were, in his view, fighters for humanity and tolerance, who "from the very beginning had distanced themselves from the Catholic Church and its dogma much further than

49 The identification of the morning star with Jesus Christ goes back to Revelation 22:16. Böhme links the love of Christ and inner illumination with the motif of the rising morning star in his *Theosophische Sendbriefe* (Theosophical Missives): "Ehrenwerter, in Christo vielgeliebter Freund, Ich wünsche euch einig und alleine, was meine Seele stets von Gott wünschet und begehret, als rechte und wahre Erkenntnis in der Liebe Jesu Christi, daß Euch der schöne Morgenstern möchte stets aufgehen, und in Euch leuchten durch dieses Jammer- Meer zur ewigen Freude" (Böhme 1956 [1730]: 84). This passage is a formal address at the beginning of a letter and draws on motives that were common in Böhme's milieu. In his *Theosophische Sendbriefe* the theme of rebirth and the doctrine of signatures, both emphasised by Eckstein, are addressed a number of times. Whether they served Eckstein as a direct source cannot be determined. He could have also taken them from other Christian-theosophical writings.

Wiclif, Hussitism, and also the Protestantism of Luther or Calvin” (Eckstein 1915: 9). He obviously read Blavatsky’s Theosophy from the outset through the glasses of old Christian theosophy and related Christian reform movements. His conversion to Protestantism in the year 1898 was clearly not only due to his then imminent marriage to Bertha Helene Diener (1874–1948) (Schweighofer 2015: 291–292).⁵⁰ With Böhme and Rosicrucianism, he became known above all in the circle of his spiritual teacher Alois Mailänder (1843–1905). This is discussed in more detail below.

Because mystical literature springs from a “deep intuition,” Eckstein continued, all those who do not have this insight and project “a sensual-materialistic view” on mystical texts would misunderstand their statements; this also applies to Sinnett’s work. The selection of the theosophical themes from *Esoteric Buddhism*, which Eckstein discusses, shows that he was interested above all in questions of lifestyle and spiritual development. He interprets the seven principles of man, which belong to the core of theosophical teaching since *Esoteric Buddhism*, as “stages of existence,” which are partly already realised in every human being and partly designed as possibilities that can be developed. The number seven, which appears in *Esoteric Buddhism* not only on the occasion of anthropological principles but regularly, should not be taken literally but “as the mystical symbol of the number mystery in general,” which Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) had taught to be a remnant from the paradisiacal state of man (Eckstein 1888: 57). With recourse to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), he interprets the fifth principle, the “human soul” or *manas*, as an instance that encompasses the mind determined by categories as well as human reason guided by ideas. Mind and reason would be surpassed by the higher existential possibilities of spirit soul (*Buddhi*) and spirit (*Atma*). To describe these “states of higher enlightenment” he again uses the Christian-theosophical concepts of spiritual rebirth and baptism (Eckstein 1888: 58).

The reincarnation theory of *Esoteric Buddhism* and the related concept of karma are summarised without comment; one point that is difficult to understand in this respect is explained by quoting a passage from the *Upaniṣads*. However, Eckstein then expressed decisive criticism of the work’s claim to uniqueness—something Sinnett underlined. What was new in *Esoteric Buddhism* was only the systematic approach, not the synthesised parts as such. The sevenfold constitution of humankind can also be found elsewhere, for

50 Diener also joined the TS. In 1921, her novel *Die Kegelschnitte Gottes* (The Conic Sections of God), a key novel on *fin de siècle* Viennese occultism, was published under her pen name “Sir Galahad.”

example in Paracelsus, Böhme, and Swedenborg, or in *Zend Avesta*. The doctrine of reincarnation was said to be “one of the oldest we know of” and for the idea of karma one can refer to the German mysticism and related thoughts of Kant.

Another point of criticism for Eckstein was the dilettantish use of Sanskrit terms: “The expert for Indian philosophy will certainly not miss the fact that most Sanskrit expressions used in the book we are discussing appear in a completely different meaning than in the Indian texts” (Eckstein 1888: 60).⁵¹ Hindu reviewers of *Esoteric Buddhism* had already stirred up the debate about the incorrect use of Sanskrit terminology. Eckstein took the side of the critics, but noted that with mystical books it is less about names and words than about meaning. The book was based on a “significant intuition” and so it would be possible to overlook this weakness.

Eckstein presented himself as an independent thinker who, from a predominantly Protestant understanding of mysticism and from a Kantian background, interpreted Theosophy and its version of an esoteric Buddhism in a largely affirmative manner. The importance of spiritual practice, once again emphasised at the end of the review, is striking. *Esoteric Buddhism* would be ultimately intended to allow the readers to enter a “world of light” high above “petty everyday life” and perhaps even lead them to follow the path that leads to enlightenment themselves. Eckstein would also like to contribute to this with his review. According to Emil Bock, Eckstein no longer held any offices in the TS in 1902 and was no longer a theosophist—and it remains an open question whether and to what extent he had ever been one (Bock 1990 [1961]: 82).

Soon after Eckstein’s review was published, in May 1888, Carl Polycarp zu Leiningen-Billigheim spoke about the aim of mysticism at the *Psychologische Gesellschaft München*. Only a little later, in July 1888, his lecture was published in the *Sphinx* (Leiningen 1888). In this article Leiningen-Billigheim refers to Eckstein’s review of *Esoteric Buddhism* in a footnote and develops a concept of mysticism very similar to that of Eckstein. One can still read it as a theosophical approach to mysticism; nevertheless, specific Blavatskian concepts and terms are almost missing and Christian theosophy is again highlighted. Practical mysticism was as important for Leiningen-Billigheim as it was for Eckstein. In addition to Böhme, whom he appreciated as an example of a “practically advanced sage,” Carl von Eckartshausen (1752–1803), who also was important for the outstanding Austrian occultist

51 “Dem Kenner indischer Philosophie wird sicher nicht entgehen, daß die meisten Sanskrit-Ausdrücke, die in dem von uns besprochenen Buche angewandt werden, in einer ganz anderen Bedeutung erscheinen, als in den indischen Texten.”

Carl Kellner, is mentioned as heir of the secret knowledge in the eighteenth century.⁵² Additionally, he affirmed the importance of Kerning with regard to practical mysticism (for more about the relation of the two Leiningen-Billigheims to Kerning, see the last section of this paper). His book *Was ist Mystik?* (What is Mysticism?; 1893) contains his mysticism-related articles published in the *Sphinx* and sums up his concept of a mystical occultism (Leiningen-Billigheim 1893). That Leiningen-Billigheim too was a thoroughly critical spirit is proven by the scathing review of a book by Franz Hartmann on Jesus Christ, which appeared in the *Sphinx* in June 1889 (Leiningen 1889). The coalition between Christian theosophy and Blavatskian-style Theosophy was fraught with tension and could break at any time.

Hartmann, another key figure of Viennese Theosophy around 1900 whose name has already been mentioned several times, was more anchored in Blavatskian doctrines, but also developed Theosophy into new directions by re-interpretations of what he understood as teachings of enlightened Christian sages like Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), Böhme, the Rosicrucians, and Kerning. Hartmann was not only in personal contact with Eckstein, Kellner, and other Austrian occultists but also wrote several articles in the *Wiener Rundschau*. From 1896 onwards, his *Internationale Theosophische Verbrüderung* had a Viennese branch, the *Theosophischer Verein in Wien* (Theosophical Association in Vienna), which was later renamed to *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Wien*. In order to be officially recognised, the association had to include a declaration in its statutes according to which it undertook not to deal with political and ecclesiastical issues as well as refrain from spiritualist and hypnotic experiments (Theosophischer Verein in Wien 1899: 6).

According to Hartmann's announcement of the new theosophical journal *Theosophischer Wegweiser* (Theosophical Guidepost) in 1898, this print medium of Hartmann's Theosophy was published by the central office of the *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Deutschland* based in Leipzig together with the *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Österreich* based in Vienna (Hartmann 1898: 917).⁵³ Hartmann emphasised in his announcement that the journal represented the spirit of freedom and tolerance that was decisive for Blavatsky when she founded the TS. In his journal *Lotusblüten* (Lotus Blossoms), he

⁵² The importance of Eckhartshausen for early Viennese Theosophy is underlined by the fact that the catalogue of the Theosophical Central Library of the *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Wien* in 1903 lists thirteen works by this author (Bücherverzeichnis der Theosophischen Zentralbibliothek für Österreich-Ungarn 1903: 15).

⁵³ This contrasts Farkas' view that the Austrian branch of the *Theosophische Verbrüderung* did not assume the name *Theosophische Gesellschaft* (Theosophical Society) until 1903 (Farkas 2020: 156).

himself allowed various views to have their say, thus representing the liberal attitude that was characteristic of early Viennese Theosophy in general.

According to information published in 1905 in the journal *Theosophisches Leben*, the *Theosophische Gesellschaft in Wien* initiated the founding of theosophical groups in Prague, Graz, Gablonz and Eger. According to this source the *Gesellschaft* counted 187 members at that time. It had rented premises that included a large lecture hall and an extensive library. Twenty people would meet weekly in a study group. This would make the Viennese Society the largest local group (of the *Internationale Theosophische Vereinigung*) in the German-speaking world.⁵⁴

In 1912, the *Österreichisch-Theosophische Gesellschaft 'Adyar'* was founded under the leadership of the German John Herman Cordes (1873–1960), a pupil of Annie Besant who had spent several years in India. Out of different reasons, the early Austrian TS Adyar was not successful and like the other theosophical groups it had to cease operating due to the political situation during the First World War (Farkas 2003: 28).⁵⁵ Within the First Republic the *Österreichische Theosophische Gesellschaft 'Adyar' in Wien* had 407 members in 1938 when Austria was incorporated into the German NS-dictatorship. This historical event had been politically and ideologically prepared since long. Parts of Viennese *fin de siècle* occultism contributed to it as we will see in the following section.

⁵⁴ *Theosophisches Leben* 8 (1905–1906), p. 232, cited in Zander 2007: 268.

⁵⁵ The theosophical lodges in Austria from 1913 are treated by Zander 2007: 226–232.

5. From Theosophy to Ariosophy

Guido v. List
in Vienna,
Who rediscovered the old Arman wisdom
That slept a thousand years covered with thorns
Who read the runes for us, deep and mysterious
Who reawakened German faith for us
—Ernst von Wolzogen (1909)⁵⁶

Among the occult currents of the *fin de siècle* period, Ariosophy is, to my knowledge, the only genuine Austrian invention.⁵⁷ Shortly after the turn of the century, it added the prototype of a *völkisch*-racist occultism to the Viennese alternative religious landscape. The term “Ariosophy” was coined only in 1915 by Adolf Josef Lanz, alias Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels. But the ideology behind this name, a theosophically-influenced racist theory about the Aryans and their superior religion, goes back to Guido List and the *völkisch* movement before him. Already before the turn of the century, the German nationalist subculture in Germany and Austria identified the Aryans with blond and blue-eyed Germans and elevated them to an aristocratic race with a mandate to rule the whole world. The imagination of one’s own race as superior was combined with the hope of a revival of Aryan culture which would make it possible to overcome the problems of modern society. The questions of which religion once ruled in the intact Ario-Germanic world and which should be introduced in the future to foster the Aryan case were answered differently.⁵⁸ There was agreement on anti-Semitism and the rejection of contemporary Christianity as alien to the Aryan spirit. Otherwise the positions oscillated between an aryanised Protestant Christianity and neo-pagan projects to re-establish the world of the Germanic gods.

Ariosophy had immediate predecessors in attempts to connect the *völkisch* subculture with Blavatskyian theories, as did the Berliner Max Ferdinand

⁵⁶ “Guido v. List in Wien, / Der alt Armanen-Weistum neu entdeckte, / Das tausend Jahr im Dornendickicht schlief, / Der uns die Runen las geheimnistief, / Der uns den *deutschen Glauben* auferweckte.” Dedication in Ernst von Wolzogen’s theatre play *Die Mai-braut* (1909) [original emphasis].

⁵⁷ I am using the term “Ariosophy” for the theosophically influenced racist theories of Guido List and Adolf Josef Lanz about the Aryans (especially the Germans) and their religion. The best work on Ariosophy remains Goodrick-Clarke’s *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, which appeared for the first time in 1985.

⁵⁸ On the religious side of *völkisch* thought, see for instance Junginger 2000; Schnurbein and Ulbricht 2001.

Sebaldt (1859–1916), who had already combined “racial hygiene,” life reform, Germanic mythology, and Theosophy. Blavatsky’s second major work, *The Secret Doctrine*, contains a racial theory that could be understood by followers of racist alternative religions at the turn of the century as an invitation to take up theosophical ideas and develop them according to their own worldview. Blavatsky postulated a higher development of humankind through the successive formation of seven “root races.” The fifth root race, which prevails in the present, is dominated by the white Aryan race. The different explications of racial prejudices within theosophical literature that were based on this doctrine “happened with debates about the details, but without contradiction in principle” (Zander 1996: 238).

The journalist and writer Guido List (see Figure 7),⁵⁹ on whose work Ariosophy is based, earned his reputation among the pan-German nationalists of the Habsburg Empire with articles and novels that evoked a glorious Germanic past, which had been brought to an end by Roman colonisation and Christianisation.⁶⁰ List saw in the Aryans coming from the north the origin of all culture. His concept of an ario-Germanic society is based on racial purity and a strictly hierarchically organised, patriarchal feudal system with a religiously legitimised kingship.

In his programmatic writing *Der Unbesiegbare* (The Invincible; 1898) he summarised the religious and moral principles of what he called the “Germanic world view” in the form of a “small catechism” for the purpose of “national education of the people.” In the face of the prevailing materialism, which would have brought misery and disaster into the world and would treat man as a “soulless machine,” List urged his readers to recognise the “spark of God” in themselves and to look up to the invincible “All-Father.” This early religious writing was still strongly oriented towards Christian content, as it took over the form of the catechism from Christianity of its time (List 1898: 5, 13).⁶¹ The reception of Christian tradition takes place against a *völkisch*-nationalist background. List turned against the “crazy doctrine” of cosmopolitanism, which would deny all tribal differences (*Stammesunterschiede*) (List 1898: 7). The tenth of the “divine laws” postulated by List reads: “Be faithful to your people and country even unto death” (List 1898: 23).⁶² He envisioned a new religiosity that would emerge from the innermost

59 From 1903, List used the aristocratic title “von List,” which he had listed in the Vienna address directory. For more detailed information on List, see Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 33-90.

60 Pytlik 2018 analyses List’s early work.

61 The interesting circumstances that led to this text cannot be elaborated here (on this, see Balzi 1917: 32).

62 “Deinem Volke und Vaterland sei treu bis in den Tod.”

emotions of the Austrian-Germanic soul. A homogenous nationalist religious education would contribute essentially to the preservation of peace within Austria. On the contrary, confessional religious instructions would only alienate the youth from national sentiments and would encourage religious controversies (ibid.: 10).

At the beginning of the new century List turned to Theosophy and dealt with the secret meaning of the runes and the reconstruction of the original language of the Aryans.⁶³ He also used heraldry, place names, fairy tales, and folk customs to reconstruct the original Germanic culture. The result was an ario-Germanic worldview that appealed to pan-German nationalists and occultists alike, and which he elaborated in a series of books until the beginning of the First World War. Franz Hartmann introduced him to Viennese and German Theosophy, which brought him new followers.

At the centre of his *völkisch* esotericism were explanations of the secret doctrine of the “Armans,” allegedly a class of priestly kings who, according to List, dominated Germanic society. In List’s view, this elite was divided in the manner of Masonic lodges into three degrees, which represented stages of initiation.⁶⁴ The sacred knowledge of the Armans would have survived in the time of the suppression by the Romans and Christianity in secret societies like the Rosicrucians, with the alchemists, in the form of the Kabbalah, or in Renaissance magic.

In the aforementioned dispute between Herndl and Lanz about feminism, List did not take a clear position. He praised Herndl’s novels, in which the issue of women would be discussed “in a very congenial manner,” and in the same breath he recommended reading the writings of Lanz. He was in favour of the free choice of partner and against marriage for purely financial reasons, but otherwise rejected the socio-economic and political equality of women (cf. List 1908b: 184-185). Within the *völkisch* movement the advocacy of the traditional subordinate position of women prevailed, but in the case of List and other representatives of neo-pagan religiosity it clashed with the idea of a traditional Germanic veneration of women as guardians of the old Germanic wisdom and mediators of the divine with a kind of priestly or prophetic authority (Pytlík 2013: 138-139). This may have been one of the reasons why List, to a certain degree, sympathised with Herndl and represented a moderate

63 With regard to the history of reception of List’s ideas, his esoteric interpretation of the runes that was based on Friedrich Fischbach’s (1839–1908) quite speculative explorations is outstanding. With it List contributed to the emergence of a genre, which to this day blossoms within neo-paganism and magic. Authors on runes who were influenced by List are, among many others, Kurtzahn 1924; Spiesberger 1955; and Thorsson 1984.

64 In 1847, List was accepted to the border lodge “Humanitas” in Neudörfel, but several years later he broke with freemasonry.

anti-feminist position compared with the spiteful criticism of the women's rights movement by Lanz (1909).

List was able to recruit an influential lobby for his ideas, which included notables such as the then mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger (1844–1910), as well as artists, theosophists (most prominently Franz Hartmann), and the financially strong German industrialist Friedrich Wannieck (1838–1919). In 1908, the *Guido von List Gesellschaft* was founded with its headquarters in Vienna. Its aim was to publish List's research results in the field of "Germanic-historical sciences" in one single publishing house and in a uniform manner. In the same year, the extensive *Guido-von-List-Bücherei* (Guido von List Library) was opened with the book *Das Geheimnis der Runen* (The Mystery of the Runes). Further works appeared in rapid succession.

After List's death in 1919, the *Guido von List Gesellschaft* led only a shadowy existence. Due to lack of money only a few new editions of his writings were published. The Society finally ended its thinned-out work at the beginning of the Second World War (Hufenreuther 2012: 298-299). The *Hohe Armanen-Orden* (High Arman Order), founded by List in 1911, had even less success and ceased to exist after a few years.⁶⁵

List's pupil and friend, Adolf Josef Lanz, alias Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, spent the years from 1893 to 1899 as a monk in the Cistercian monastery of Heiligenkreuz near Vienna (see Figure 8). In accordance with his background in Catholic theology he refers more to biblical and other Near East religious sources than List. Already during his monastic years, his thought was dominated by the idea of a deep conflict between humankind's divine nature and its animal nature. Later this view was combined with a *völkisch* social Darwinism. Lanz further developed List's linking of racist ethnic ideology with occult concepts. He radicalised it in terms of anti-Semitism and patriarchal thought (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 90-106; Paape 2015).⁶⁶

In his major work *Theozoologie oder die Kunde von den Sodoms-Äfflingen und dem Götter-Elektron* (Theozoology or the Tale of the Sodom Apelings and the Electron of the Gods), published in 1904, he followed the fascination with electric currents and invisible rays, which enchanted *fin de siècle* culture. In this book electricity functions as a synonym for a widespread occultist idea: a subtle energy (the astral light as Eliphas Lévi would

⁶⁵ In 1976, Adolf Schleipfer (b. 1947) re-established the *Armanen-Orden* as an elitist anti-Semitic occult movement of the German extreme right wing.

⁶⁶ As shown above, List had a certain sympathy for feminist concerns to which Franz Herndl had introduced him. The "good German" was supposed to honour and protect women. Lanz, by contrast, saw them as lascivious creatures who are constantly tempted to abandon themselves to representatives of more inferior races.

say) that connects the divine and the physical plane, being the cause of paranormal powers and the deification of the human being.

The gods are slumbering in the ape-infected human bodies, but the day will come when they will rise again. Electrically we were, electrically we will become, to be electric and divine is one! Through the electric eye the pre-humans were omniscient, through their electric power omnipotent. The omniscient, the omnipotent, he has the right to call himself God (Lanz 1904: 91).⁶⁷

He also referred to mesmerism in the form of the *Od* doctrine of the chemist Carl Freiherr von Reichenbach (1788–1869), who lived and experimented at the Cobenzl castle near Vienna and was influential not only in occult Vienna but on an international level (Lanz-Liebenfels 1918; see also Hamann 2012: 311).

Lanz interpreted the Christian history of salvation from the Fall of Man to the redemption through Jesus Christ and his final return through the lens of modern racial theories and eugenic programmes. He postulated the former existence of a race of God-men or superhumans (called “Theozoa”) that lived on earth and communicated telepathically by means of electrical signals. The Theozoa would have mixed with low beast-like human races dominated by sexual desire, the *Sodoms-Äfflinge* (Sodom Ape-men; or, more literally, Sodom Apelings), and thereby lost their god-like abilities. It was from this intermingling of races that humankind as we know it today emerged. Among the race of the Aryans, whose original homeland is said to have been Atlantis and Germania, the largest part of the divine genome has been preserved. Therefore, it must be the highest goal of religion to take care of the purity of the Aryan race: “God is purified race!” (Lanz 1904: 136). In addition, the divine qualities of the Theozoa are to be renewed through a eugenic programme of human breeding.

Christologically he joined the *aufgeklärte Ansicht* (enlightened view) of Arius, which he appreciated not least because it became the religion of the Germanic peoples. Jesus Christ is not God but a creature in every aspect, though superior to all other beings. In a further step he interpreted Arian Christology pluralistically. Jesus Christ was not the only God-man, but one among many, albeit one of the last that lived on earth. He will return as “the pure-bred and transfigured white man of the future”⁶⁸ (Lanz 1904: 132). The

67 “Die Götter schlummern in den verafften Menschenleibern, es kommt aber der Tag, da sie wieder erstehen. Elektrisch waren wir, elektrisch werden wir werden, elektrisch und göttlich sein, ist eins! Durch das elektrische Auge waren die Vormenschen allwissend, durch ihre elektrische Kraft allmächtig. Der Allwissende, der Allmächtige, er hat das Recht, sich Gott zu nennen.”

68 “der wieder reingezüchtete und verklärte weiße Mensch der Zukunft.”

“dominion of the heavens” that Jesus Christ proclaimed, Lanz read it as “an earthly concept, an ideal, social and race-hygenic state!”⁶⁹ (ibid.: 134).

As male Christian theologians did time and again in the course of history, Lanz justified the dominion of man over woman with Eve’s role in the Fall. In Lanz’ case it was her lust for the sensual ape-men that led to the devastating mixture of races (Lanz 1904: 147). And afterwards only male help saved her from the sexual violence of the apelings: “What woman is today, she is by the sword and by the power of man. Man wrested woman from the sodom-apes, therefore she is his property”⁷⁰ (ibid.: 152).

It is not male or female sexuality per se but the violation of the racial hierarchy by sexual desire that Lanz condemned: “Agape, the pure, heavenly, non-ape-like love, but love in a completely sexual sense, is the innermost core of Jesus’ teaching” (Lanz 1904: 155).⁷¹ The Germanic men are to copulate exclusively with strong and faithful Nordic women, in whom the electron of the gods still slumbers. The reproduction of the inferior races should be reduced by contraception and sterilisation. The goal of the evolution of humankind, however, are angelic hermaphroditic human beings that reproduce themselves no longer in a carnal way, but perhaps through electric radiation (ibid.: 153).

In 1900, Lanz created the *Ordo Novi Templi* (Order of the New Temple; ONT) as a racial and religious avant-garde, and had more success with it than List with his High Arman Order. During the Habsburg Monarchy, the ONT was only active in Vienna and at the ruins of Werfenstein Castle in St. Nikola an der Donau (Upper Austria). After the First World War, several branches were established in Germany and Hungary. Lanz left Austria in 1918 and moved to Budapest. In its best years, between about 1925 and 1935, the ONT had probably up to 300 to 400 members (Goodrick-Clarke 2006: 674). In 1942, it was banned by the Gestapo, although the *Lumenklub*, an association for the promotion of the ONT that had existed since 1932, had not only spread Ariosophy in Vienna, but also requisitioned members for the NSDAP, which was illegal in Austria between 1933 and 1938 (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 119). In a way that has not yet been fully clarified historiographically, the ONT continued to exist both in Hungary and the German-speaking world, and even survived the end of the Nazi regime.

69 “Die ‘Herrschaft der Himmel’ ist also ein irdischer Begriff, ein idealer, sozialer und rassenhygenischer Staat.”

70 “Was das Weib heute ist, ist es durch das Schwert und die Kraft des Mannes. Der Mann hat das Weib den Sodomsaffen abgerungen, dafür ist es sein Eigentum.”

71 “Agape, die reine, himmlische, entaffte Liebe, aber Liebe ganz im geschlechtlichen Sinn, ist der innerste Kern der Jesulehre.”

In 1906, Lanz co-founded the quite influential journal *Ostara*, an anti-liberal and pan-German periodical, the contents of which he was solely responsible for from 1908 on (Paape 2015: 67-130). He used it to spread his ariosophical ideas. The first series of the magazine ended in 1917. It was continued by two further series with limited reach and circulation until 1931. In the years before the First World War, the *Ostara* was available in the numerous Viennese tobacconist shops and was particularly popular among right-wing student fraternities. The young Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) also read issues of *Ostara* (Hamann 2012: 317). His early speeches in particular show that he also adopted elements from the theories of List, who was at the height of his literary activity and popularity during Hitler's Vienna years. However, most of the contemporary scholars affirm that the influence of Ariosophy on Hitler's thought and National Socialism should not be overestimated.⁷² As Goodrick-Clarke was already aware, the ariosophical anticipation of National Socialist ideas was far more a symptom of a broad historical trend that eventually led to the Nazi state than a concrete influential factor, even if Lanz and some of his followers presented Ariosophy as a pioneering and essential source of National Socialism (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 202).⁷³

After the Second World War, the Ariosophy of Adolf Joseph Lanz had a major influence on the emergence of esoteric neo-Nazism. The nucleus of this movement was a small Viennese discussion group led by three right-wing radicals known as the Landig Circle, Vienna Group, or Vienna Lodge. In the 1950s, the members of the Vienna Group invented a narrative that in their view could explain the defeat of Germany and postulated the existence of esoteric SS circles that still guard the treasure of old Gnostic knowledge and fight the forces of evil (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 128-150; Strube 2012). The founder of this circle was the Vienna-born Wilhelm Landig (1909–1997), a former member of the *Waffen-SS*. Rudolf Mund (1920–1985) was also a member of the *Waffen-SS*, who according to Goodrick-Clarke (2002: 135) became a member of the ONT in 1958 and its prior in 1979. The Swiss engineer Erich Halik (1926–1995) contributed ufological elements to the circle

72 Cf. the final verdict in Hamann 2012: 317-316 as well as Hakl 2012; Strube 2015; Paape 2015: 257-264.

73 The claim made by Lanz and some of his followers that Ariosophy was of crucial importance for National Socialism was adopted by Wilfried Daim (1923–2016) who caused a sensation with his repeatedly published book on Lanz as a source of Hitler's ideas (Daim 1958). In academic historiography, Daim's approach is considered outdated. In recent years, the Canadian historian Eric Kurlander renewed the theory of a significant influence of Ariosophy on the National Socialist ideology (Kurlander 2017). As far as I can see, he did not provide any significant new sources in order to make this view more plausible.

and started to publish their ideas. Ultimately, Landig's *Thule Trilogie* (Thule Trilogy), a series of novels published between 1971 and 1991 and until today widely read in right-wing circles, handed down ariosophical ideas into the twenty-first century.

As has been shown, occult Vienna has been connected with political agendas of both its supporters and opponents from the very beginning. The trend to radicalism in the form of Ariosophy took place along the well-known front lines: the attitude towards the liberal bourgeoisie; women's rights; racism and especially anti-Semitism; pan-German nationalism. Historians usually interpret the rise of extremist movements in Austria as an expression of the growing social tensions during the final phase of the Habsburg Empire (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 1-17). Finally, it contributed to an extreme right-wing mindset which, beyond the historical situation of its origins, threatens to flare up time and again in times of similar social problems.

The final section of this paper turns back from the radicalised offshoots of occult Vienna and their historical impact to its moderate theosophical roots. The occultists of the Danube monarchy were not only interested in establishing libraries, reading circles, and discussion groups, but were also looking for new ways of religious practice and experience.

6. Alois Mailänder as Spiritual Guide of Viennese Occultism and the Influence of Johann Baptist Krebs (Kerning)

When it comes to the spirituality of Viennese occultism and important parts of the German-speaking theosophical milieu connected with it, apart from influences of South Asian yoga that I have discussed elsewhere (Baier 2018), two important reference persons should be highlighted: Alois Mailänder and Johann Baptist Krebs, alias J. B. Kerning.

The literature on Mailänder is sparse (Bock 1990 [1961]: 181-188; Glowka 1981: 105-107; Binder 2009: 177-199; Dilloo-Heidger 2020).⁷⁴ He came from Ravensburg in Swabia and was an uneducated worker who was unable to write so that he had to dictate letters to his pupils, but he was apparently able to read (Binder 2009: 185). He worked as weaver and later as foreman in a mechanical weaving mill in Kempten (Southern Germany) (Dilloo-Heidger 2020: 19). After experiencing an awakening in 1877, he

⁷⁴ I would like to sincerely thank Erik Dilloo-Heidger for providing me with the unpublished manuscript of his annotated edition of Mailänder's letters to Meyrink.

founded the *Bund der Verheißung* (Covenant of Promise), whose members were initially factory workers and their wives who were friends of Mailänder. His brother-in-law Nikolaus Gabele (1844–1923) became his right hand in the leadership of this fringe Christian community. In the 1880s, the interest of occultists from abroad radically changed Mailänder's life and he became a teacher of the upper-class occult elite of Germany and the German-speaking part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In December 1884, Hübbe-Schleiden was the first important theosophist to meet Mailänder (or *Bruder Johannes*—Brother John—as he was called within his community) (Bock 1990 [1961]: 180). After accompanying Blavatsky on her journey from India to Europe in the spring of 1885, Franz Hartmann went to Kempten, the town where he had spent his childhood and where Mailänder lived. Not long after his arrival he made contact with the *Bund der Verheißung*. In September 1885, he published a lengthy article about his conversations with members of the community in *The Theosophist*, probably the first public account on the *Bund* ever, and at least the first one in the theosophical world. In the article Hartmann calls the community a secret society of occultists possessing a high moral character. Although being illiterate, the members would be acquainted with the secret doctrine of esoteric philosophy: “They have never read ‘Esoteric Buddhism,’ still they know much that is identical with it; they know nothing of the Yoga philosophy, still they practice it [...]” (Hartmann 1885: 293).

Soon many leading theosophists and other occultists were consulting him. Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932) speaks of a total of fifty-four pupils of Mailänder without indicating from where he took this number (Meyrink 2010: 139). Erik Dilloo-Heidger (2020: 44-46) succeeded in identifying thirty pupils (among them eight women). Key actors of Viennese occultism and its cultural surroundings became adherents of the Swabonian guru: Friedrich Eckstein and his German friend Arthur Gebhard; Carl Polycarp zu Leiningen-Billingheim; Franz Hartmann; Meyrink and his wife; the theosophist Blasius von Schemua (1856–1920) from the *Guido von List Gesellschaft*; and, according to Hartmann, Carl Kellner as well (see Figure 9). They visited Mailänder from time to time (and regularly during intense phases of their relationship) for several days or even weeks and exchanged letters with him. For some of them the teacher-pupil relationship lasted for several years.

When he fell seriously ill because of the factory work he had to do thirteen to fourteen hours a day and also because of the growing interest into his teachings, the aforementioned theosophical couple Gebhard and other patrons enabled him to resign and leave Kempten. Mailänder first moved to the vicinity of Elberfeld, where the Gebhards lived, but did not feel comfortable in his new North German surroundings. His rich patrons then tried to acquire a farm

in Hallein near Salzburg for him, probably because at that time Hartmann and Kellner were living and working there. This venture also failed and finally, in 1890, an estate was acquired for him in Dreieichenhain, a small village south of Frankfurt am Main relatively easy to reach via train, where the Mailänder and Gabele families lived from then on and where the two men had all the facilities to look after Mailänder's circle of pupils. There was an agreement between Mailänder and his students that they would not reveal his real name, their discipleship, or anything of his teachings before his death. With very few exceptions, they followed this rule (Dilloo-Heidger 2020: 13, 17).

What made Mailänder so appealing? He himself was of Catholic background, while his brother-in-law Nikolaus Gabele was Old Catholic. However, the religious culture of the *Bund der Verheißung* did not refer to Catholic traditions but was based on a mixture of pietism, Rosicrucianism, Kerning's thought, and maybe also Jakob Böhme and spiritualism. As Erik Dilloo (2018: 142) pointed out, Mailänder's town of birth, Ravensburg, as well as Kempten where he lived and the *Bund* was founded, were pietist enclaves and there might have been some influence from this side on him. Moreover, the Catholic surrounding of the pietist enclaves was influenced by a revivalist movement founded by the theologian Michael Sailer (1753–1832) (Dilloo-Heidger 2020: 21). Sailer was a friend of Carl von Eckartshausen and the Protestant theologian Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801). Some of Mailänder's more "esoteric" ideas may also have come from this milieu. Emil Bock, who knew parts of a manuscript by Mailänder which he circulated among his pupils under the title *Formenlehre* (Theory of Forms) from the Hübbe-Schleiden estate (ibid.: 16), assumes that Mailänder taught a simplified version of Jakob Böhme's thought:

In the circle around Mailänder an entire world view was, so to speak, developed through signs. They called this the "theory of forms." All letters, plants, animals had a certain symbolic value. Something like a primitive derivation of Jakob Boehme's theosophy was cultivated there (Bock 1990 [1961]: 185).⁷⁵

Mailänder is said to have had a teacher named "Prestel," a master carpenter who was an itinerant Rosicrucian versed in alchemy. The interest in alchemy that Hartmann, Meyrink, Kellner, and other occultists had, was, if not piqued,

⁷⁵ "In dem Kreise um Mailänder wurde eine ganze Weltanschauung sozusagen in Zeichen ausgebildet. Sie nannten das die 'Formenlehre'. Alle Buchstaben, Pflanzen, Tiere hatten einen bestimmten Bildwert. So etwas wie eine primitive Ableitung von Jakob Böhmes Theosophie wurde da gepflegt."

at least confirmed by the Mailänder circle. But what made the *Bund der Verheißung* attractive above all else was Mailänder's offer of spiritual guidance and the practice he taught, which was based on the silent or semi-silent murmuring of certain sentences (Binder 2009: 195).

According to Meyrink, Mailänder

had had strange experiences in the area of spiritualism, which he called the preparatory stage for acquiring true knowledge, which came solely from the heart, and nowhere else, when it began to speak. This speaking of the heart he called the "inner word"; it awoke gradually, he said, and was granted through 'grace' in the Christian sense. He showed his numerous pupils the way to this by giving them phrases, which he said he received from his inner voice for each one individually, to murmur to themselves. This murmuring-to-oneself, he said, would arouse our own heart's ability to speak and, moreover, a certain alteration would take place in our bodies until at the end of the way Christ's immortal body would be instilled in the disciple and with it Life Immortal (Meyrink 2010: 138).⁷⁶

The phrases consisted of one or two short sentences that mostly reflected Christian piety. Here are some examples that Meyrink delivered. The sentences were given to him successively between March 22, 1895, and September 21, 1903: "I, Ruben [i.e., Meyrink's spiritual name as a pupil of Mailänder], hold fast to my redeemer";⁷⁷ "Our father in Heaven, keep your servant alive";⁷⁸ "In the name of God the Father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit";⁷⁹ quite enigmatic and probably referring to oral teachings: "In the number twelve lies the universe. And this [universe] be subject to us";⁸⁰ "I am in your hand";⁸¹ "It is freedom that flows through my limbs / It is the love

76 "[Mailänder] hatte seltsamste Erfahrungen auf dem Gebiete des Spiritismus gemacht, nannte ihn die Vorschule zum wahren Wissen, das einzig allein aus dem Herzen käme, wenn dieses zu sprechen begänne. Dies Sprechen des Herzens nannte er das innere Wort. Es erwache mit der Zeit und werde verliehen durch die 'Gnade' im christlichen Sinne: Den Weg dazu wies er seinen zahlreichen Schülern, indem er ihnen Sätze, die er, wie er sagte, durch seine innere Stimme für jeden erhielt, zu murmeln gab. Durch solches Insichhineinmurmeln erwache alsbald die Sprechfähigkeit des eigenen Herzens und außerdem geschehe eine gewisse Umwandlung des Leibes, bis am Ende des Weges der Unsterblichkeitsleib Christi im Schüler anerzogen worden sei und damit das Ewige Leben" (Meyrink 1981: 229).

77 "Ich, Ruben, halte fest an meinem Erlöser."

78 "Unser Vater, der Du im Himmel bist, erhalte deinen Knecht."

79 "Im Namen Gott des Vaters, Gott des Sohnes, u. Gott des Heiligen Geistes."

80 "In der Zahl zwölf liegt das All, / und das sei uns unterthan."

81 "Ich bin in Deiner Hand."

of God that / sustains me”;⁸² “I overcome everything with the grace of God”;⁸³ “I search for my Self within me”;⁸⁴ “I want to awaken / to freedom”⁸⁵ (Binder 2009: 195-196; Dilloo-Heidger 2020: 36). Apparently, the first formulas that Meyrink received were taken from the tradition of Christian short prayers. They did not inspire him much, as his difficulties with this kind of practice show (Meyrink 2010: 140-141). Later, and especially after Meyrink confessed to him in October 1900 that he could not believe in Jesus Christ (Mailänder 2020: 94), Mailänder reduced the elements of Christian piety and tried to suit his sentences to Meyrink’s mindset.

According to Mailänder’s doctrine the transformation of the body through silent murmuring was not only accompanied by certain dreams and visions. It should produce what Mailänder called *Vorgänge* (events, processes): visible effects like stigmata or the appearance of letters on the skin of the participants; or unusual body sensations like vibrations; or a kind of inner humming (Dilloo-Heidger 2020: 81).⁸⁶ The *Vorgänge* indicated the pupils’ stage of development and were discussed in talks or in the correspondence with Mailänder.

Mailänder’s German and Austro-Hungarian occultist students understood these practices as part of the Rosicrucian tradition. Indeed, the bodily transformation through the awakening of the inner word can be related to the concept of spiritual alchemy found in Böhme and Böhman theologians (Zuber 2017). Mailänder’s exercises were particularly attractive to the theosophists striving for mystical experiences, as the body was methodically included in meditative practice, which triggered intensive experiences. Mailänder was considered to be a competent specialist (“master”) capable of supervising and guiding the process of spiritual transformation according to the individual needs of each pupil.

One of the most important sources of Mailänder was J. B. Kerning (Johann Baptist Krebs). Kerning studied Catholic theology but finally became an opera tenor and vocal coach. He published a large number of theological

82 “Die Freiheit ist’s, die durchströmet meine Glieder / die Liebe Gottes ist’s, die / mich erhält.”

83 “Ich überwinde alles mit Gottes Gnade.”

84 “Ich suche mein Ich in mir.”

85 “Ich will erwachen / zur Freiheit.”

86 It may not be a coincidence that it was Meyrink who wrote Mailänder that he had felt such sensations, since he knew translations of Haṭha Yoga scriptures where they are described (Dilloo-Heidger 2020: 37) and this may have influenced his experiences. But Mailänder’s answer sounds as if he was quite familiar with them. Similar sensations are also known in the Kerning tradition (Kerning 1914a: 104; Kolb 1935: 102).

and philosophical writings that often include instructions for meditation and he was a highly regarded freemason.

Already Mailänder's disciples Karl Weinfurter (1867–1940), Meyrink, and Hübbe-Schleiden noticed the proximity between Mailänder and Kerning (Weinfurter 1986 [1923]: 186, 202; Hübbe-Schleiden 1913; Meyrink 2010: 163, 165). Weinfurter points out that Mailänder's spiritual exercises correspond to Kerning's style of practice throughout: "Also all details of the path were based exactly on the remarks scattered here and there by Kerning in his writings, only that, of course, these remarks are observed only by those who actually are on or walked the path" (Weinfurter 1986 [1923]: 202).⁸⁷ Meyrink highlights that Mailänder prescribed a spiritual path similar to Kerning's without knowing about his system at least at the beginning of his career as a spiritual guide. Hübbe-Schleiden supposes that Kerning inspired Mailänder's practical instructions (Kaczynski 2012: 64-65).

From a historiographical point of view, we still do not (and probably never will) know when and how Mailänder came into contact with Kerning's work, nor do we have a list of the writings of Kerning he actually knew. But at least it is certain that he was familiar with *Schlüssel zur Geisterwelt* (The Key to the World of Spirits) and *Wege zur Unsterblichkeit* (Paths to Immortality) as he wanted his students to read both writings.⁸⁸ In his book on mysticism, Carl Polycarp zu Leiningen-Billigheim (1893: 12) calls these two works "folksy little writings," which would be "among the most lively and easy-to-read" pieces ever written on practical mysticism. Obviously, they were aimed at a wider audience. Rolf Speckner assumes that they were used as introductory literature in the Mailänder circle because they were recommended to Hübbe-Schleiden in a relatively early phase of his discipleship (Speckner 2014b: 10).

Like many other of Kerning's books, *Schlüssel zur Geisterwelt* and *Wege zur Unsterblichkeit* consist of conversations embedded in a narrative. The talks revolve around self-knowledge and knowledge of God. The figure of a spiritual leader always plays a central role—not a priest or monk, but someone with a secular profession. This guide not only provides theoretical knowledge, but also, and above all, instructions for certain exercises which his pupils, after meeting their guide, carry out on their own for many hours a day and during a longer period that may last months or even a year. During

87 "Auch sämtliche Einzelheiten des Weges waren genau nach dem von Kerning hie und da in seinen Schriften verstreuten Bemerkungen gehalten, nur daß diese Bemerkungen nur der beachtet, der tatsächlich den Weg geht oder ging."

88 Apparently the first edition of both works appeared in 1833 and they were reissued during the nineteenth century. The detailed publication history of Kerning's writings still needs to be explored in detail.

this time the teacher and his students occasionally exchange letters. Then they return to the teacher to have the results of their practice confirmed or to discuss insolvable problems they encountered. The entry into the student-teacher relationship is based on the student's free decision. Within this relationship, however, strict obedience must be paid to the teacher, even if his tasks at first seem incomprehensible or ridiculous. All this corresponds exactly to Mailänder's teaching method.

With the exception of the practice of the Lord's Prayer, in both books the spiritual practice is based on the silent repetition of single words. Kerning, time and again, emphasises that the inner murmur should be felt in different limbs and throughout the whole body. Actually, the intensification of body awareness is a main target of his exercises: "Not only in the heart or in the head, no; through the whole body man must learn to feel and recognise himself, otherwise he mutilates himself and does not become fit for perfect life" (Kerning 1914b: 168).⁸⁹ Besides the work with the meditation formulas, the practice of mere concentration directed at different parts of the body, beginning with the feet, serves this purpose. However, this kind of exercise is not described in detail in the two volumes (Kerning 1914a: 105-108). The successive stages of self-knowledge are to be realised through the meditation of the words "I," "human," "inner nature," and finally "king" (Kerning 1914b: 96, 110, 114, 117).

The initial exercise on the path to the knowledge of God is the steady murmuring repetition of the Lord's prayer. Kerning based this practice on the biblical advice not to use many words when praying, which is connected with the recommendation of the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:7-9):

Hereby it is said: You should pray nothing else but this; repeat it so quietly and so often that not only your mouth, but your heart, indeed your whole nature, from the skin to the innermost point of your body, learns it by heart. When you then feel the effect of it, when your hair stands on end, your bones burn you, think: you have received Baptism (Kerning 1914a: 103-104).⁹⁰

The use of short prayers or sentences, a characteristic of Mailänder's method, is not excluded by Kerning, but he does not describe or recommended it nor

⁸⁹ "Nicht nur im Herzen und im Kopfe, nein, durch den ganzen Leib muß der Mensch sich empfinden und erkennen lernen, sonst verstümmelt er sich und wird nicht tauglich zum vollkommenen Leben."

⁹⁰ "Hiemit ist ausgesprochen: du sollst nichts anderes als dieses beten; es so still und so oft wiederholen, daß nicht nur dein Mund, sondern dein Herz, ja, deine ganze Natur, von der Haut an bis zum innersten Punkte deines Leibes, es auswendig lernt. Wenn du dann die Wirkung davon empfindest, wenn dein Haar sich sträubt, deine Knochen dich brennen, so denke: du habest die Taufe empfangen."

does he give examples for it in his writings. He also does not mention that signs should appear on the practitioner's skin. It seems that Mailänder introduced these elements.

Kerning and Mailänder speak of visions and dreams arising as the exercises progress. Furthermore, both assume that the practitioner must go through a painful crisis that they conceive as participation in the passion of Jesus Christ: "From the day of the foot-washing to the death on the cross, everything is written for us alone. If we believe childishly, practice blindly, we shall also resurrect" (Kerning 1914a: 108).⁹¹ The goal of the whole process is a spiritual rebirth that is connected with the experience of immortality. The born-again practitioner is able to receive the Word of God with his whole body and be guided by the truths revealed by it (ibid.: 211).

In addition to the aforementioned exercises, Kerning also knew a form of meditation based on the investigation and application of the special powers of letters and phonemes (vowels as well as consonants). He assigned this area of advanced research and practice to what he called the secret doctrine, Kabbalah or philosophy of nature: "The elementary teachings of Kabbalah are concerned with the forms of the letters, how they present themselves to the ear, feeling, and eye" (Kerning 1912: 73).⁹² He combined the visualisation of letters and the silent murmuring of the assigned sounds with the concentration on certain parts of the body to awaken the powers of the letters in the body. An example:

1. One stretches the index finger upwards, as if to command silence, and practices this until one sees and feels the letter I in it. [...] 2. Once the first letter, the I, is felt in this way, one forms the square with the index finger and the thumb and continues until one sees and feels the letter A in this sign. 3. Once one is certain of the matter, so that one can clearly perceive and feel the I and A within the sign in question, one places them on the throat to communicate them to the whole body (Kerning 1912: 125).⁹³

91 "Von dem Tage der Fußwaschung bis zum Tod am Kreuze ist Alles nur für uns geschrieben. Wenn wir kindlich glauben, blindlings üben, so werden wir auch auferstehen." For this motive as a part of Mailänder's teachings, see Meyrink 2010: 139.

92 "Die Elementarlehre der Kabbala beschäftigt sich mit den Formen der Buchstaben, wie selbige sich dem Ohr, dem Gefühl und dem Auge darstellen."

93 "1. Man streckt den Zeigefinger in die Höhe, als wenn man Stillschweigen gebieten wollte, und übt dieses so lange, bis man darin den Buchstaben I sieht und empfindet. [...] 2. Hat man auf diese Art den ersten Buchstaben, das I, empfunden, bildet man mit dem Daumen und Zeigefinger das Winkelmaß und fährt damit so lange fort, bis man in diesem Zeichen den Buchstaben A sieht und empfindet. 3. Ist man der Sache gewiß, so daß sich I und A in dem besagten Zeichen deutlich wahrnehmen lassen und fühlen, so legt man sie an den Hals, um sie dem ganzen Körper mitzuteilen."

In addition, several forms of breathing are used in these exercises. Kerning conceptualised breathing as a rhythmical process where the filling of one pole is always connected with the emptying of its opposite pole. Thus, every inhalation through one part of the body is accompanied with an exhalation through another part and vice versa:

The usual intake of breath is through the nose, sometimes also through the mouth, the opposite through the organs we cover (pubic parts). Through practice, other opposites are obtained, for example through the nose and navel, through the nose and the pit of the heart, or the throat pit (Kerning 1912: 140).⁹⁴

There is not only one air to inhale and to exhale, but many different forms of it, with the heavenly, divine ether as the highest. The different manifestations of air relate to different channels and openings within the body. The various theories and practices related to breathing are only briefly sketched out in Kerning's writings, but are not described in detail.

The first printed account of Kerning's letter exercises by his disciple Karl Kolb (d. 1895) was published as early as 1857 without gaining much attention beyond the circle of Kerning's former pupils. Kolb's book was re-edited in 1905. Mailänder died in January of that year. In 1907 and 1912, respectively, the two other seminal writings on Kerning's letter method and breathing techniques were published, namely his *Briefe über die königliche Kunst* (Letters on the Royal Art) originally dedicated to the freemason, philosopher, and expert on the Kabbalah Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860), and *Kernings Testament* (Kerning's Testament; Kerning 1917).⁹⁵ They had previously only been available as unprinted manuscripts.

There is little to suggest that the letter method and Kerning's techniques of body awareness and breathing exercises were known in the *Bund der Verheißung* as they are not mentioned in almost all of the descriptions of Mailänder's practices handed down by his pupils. However, it cannot be ruled out that some instructions have been kept secret even after Mailänder's death. In the available descriptions of his exercises, there is a gap between the murmuring-to-oneself and the appearance of signs on the skin. Probably some of Kerning's body-centred techniques were used to connect the silent recitations

94 "Das gewöhnliche Einziehen des Atems geschieht durch die Nase, manchmal auch durch den Mund, das entgegengesetzte durch Organe, die wir bedecken (Schamtheile). Durch Übung erlangt man andere Gegensätze, zum Beispiel durch Nase und Nabel, durch Nase und Herzgrübchen, oder das Grübchen am Halse."

95 On Molitor and the *Briefe über die königliche Kunst*, see Speckner 2014a: 47.

to the limbs of the body. This was the case according to the earliest description of the exercises practiced by the members of the *Bund der Verheißung* by Hartmann:

When I asked them about the process of their development, they gave a description, of which I will translate a few passages: “Man passes through a spiral evolution that appears like steps of a ladder. Learn to understand that your strength is rooted in your feet. Descend from the arch of the temple (the head) to the foot of the stairs, and raise slowly up to the centre (the head). There you will find a seed, that will begin to germinate through the influence of a light created by thought” (Hartmann 1885: 294).

In the light of the heart the practitioner would finally discover the immortal Word (Hartmann 1885: 294). In Hartmann’s description the murmuring of sentences is completely absent. One can assume that it was stylised after the model of yoga texts. But the exercise begins with concentration on the feet, which is a peculiarity of Kerning’s method. It is unlikely that this element comes from yoga instructions. He probably got to know it in Kempten.

Apart from Hartmann, other indophile theosophists as well regarded Kerning’s and Mailänder’s techniques as practiced yoga philosophy or “German yoga training” (Hübbe-Schleiden 2009: 446).⁹⁶ Kerning himself supposed that his kind of meditation practice based on language (prayer texts, words, phonemes) connected with body awareness and breathing techniques revitalised a primordial wisdom that was known within every ancient high culture (Kerning 1912: 85). At least two passages explicitly refer to South Asian spirituality. The first one shows that he had some knowledge of the use of mantras in the Hindu traditions and that he recognised the similarity between it and the ancient Christian prayer technique of *ruminatio*, the constant repetition of short prayer formulas or memoranda:

Every brahmin who reaches a certain level receives a special word from the chief brahmin, which has to serve him as a means to tune his moods in all

⁹⁶ See also Kellner 1896: 6: “Finally, I have to mention that, among the Christian mystics, Jakob Boehme in his discourse between the master and his disciple and J. Krebs, who published on this topic in the 1850s under the pen name Kerning [...], represent the best that has ever been written in German about yoga exercises, albeit in a form that might not be to everyone’s taste.” (“Erwähnen muss ich nur noch, dass unter den christlichen Mystikern Jakob Boehme in seinem Gespräch des Meisters mit dem Schüler und der unter dem Pseudonym Kerning in den fünfziger Jahren auf diesem Gebiete literarisch tätig gewesene J. Krebs das Beste über Yogaübungen in deutscher Sprache geschrieben haben, allerdings in einer Form, die nicht nach jedermanns Geschmack ist.”) The end of Kellner’s statement shows once again the reservations of some of the indophile occultists about the Christian sources of the Mailänder circle.

matters of life, in speeches, prayers, help and comfort for the unfortunate and sick. The earliest Christian Church Fathers used this means with greatest success, and it is only important to learn to feel and think such a word within oneself, then its effect will be as certain and infallible as nothing else throughout creation (Kerning 1922: 92-93).⁹⁷

The second passage relates to a yogic technique known as *yonimudrā* (Kerning 1912: 102-103). The version of this exercise that Kerning knew comprises the closing of the ears, eyes, nostrils, and lips with the fingers and of the genitals and anus with the heels. It was quite well-known among German intellectuals in the Romantic era interested in South Asian religion. Joseph Görres (1776–1848) had included a German description of it taken from Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron’s (1731–1805) translation of the *Upaniṣads*, the *Oupnek’hat*, into his review of this work and later into his *Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt* (Görres 1810: 113-114).⁹⁸ According to both the *Oupnek’hat* and Görres the purpose of this *mudrā* is to protect “the lamp in the vessel of the body” so that the whole vessel becomes light. Kerning’s comment on this practice shows that he took the yogic practice seriously and responded to it in an experimental and creative way. He argued that only Indians are flexible enough to perform this exercise and suggested modifications of the technique for Westerners, which he has obviously tried out himself at least partially:

But such a visible closing of the bodily openings is not necessary, because with the tongue, as soon as it is properly animated, we can close all the above-mentioned openings.⁹⁹ We can also close the mouth, nose, eyes, ears, and the other two openings separately and have almost the same effects. For example, one exhales through the mouth, closes it tightly with lips and tongue, draws

97 “Jeder Bramine, der eine gewisse Stufe erreicht, erhält vom Oberbrahminen ein eigenes Wort, das ihm als Stimmungsmittel bei allen Angelegenheiten des Lebens, bei Reden, Gebeten, Hilfsleistungen und Trostgründen für Unglückliche und Kranke dienen muß. Die ersten christlichen Kirchenväter haben sich dieses Mittels mit dem besten Erfolg bedient, und es kommt nur darauf an, ein solches Wort in sich fühlen und denken zu lernen, so ist seine Wirkung so sicher und unfehlbar, als kein anderes in der ganzen Schöpfung.”

98 Görres refers to *Oupnek’nath* (Tome 2, p. 203). The text is taken from *Djogtat*, that is, *Yogatattva Upaniṣad*, the twenty-first *Upaniṣad* in Anquetil-Duperron’s counting.

99 This probably refers to another yogic technique that Görres took from the *Oupnek’hat*: bending the tongue back to its root to bind speech, heart, senses, and breath (Görres 1810: 113).

the breath of the mouth to oneself, and one will get to see the whole body illuminated, as it were (Kerning 1912: 103).¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, as far as we know today, Kerning's knowledge about yoga exercises was quite sparse; rather, his own creativity along with European theological and philosophical traditions, his experiences as an opera singer and vocal coach, and especially the ideas of the Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) were more important sources for his spiritual practices.¹⁰¹ Traces of Pestalozzi's thinking can be found in several of his works. At one point, having Pestalozzi's pedagogy in mind, he asks:

What do you think [...] would come out if theology was also treated in this way and the candidate, instead of filling his head with terminologies, theses, and often incomprehensible dogmas, was taught the matter in an elementary way and progressed from the elements to the matter and the spirit? (Kerning 1920: 46).¹⁰²

His whole system can be read as an attempt to answer this question. Maybe he found ideas for his letter meditations in kabbalistic, masonic, and other sources, but the influence of Pestalozzi seems to have been crucial in any case.

Within Habsburgian occultism, Kerning's teachings did not only spread via Mailänder and his circle. The members of the Prague Blue Star Lodge, for example, read and discussed *Schlüssel zur Geisterwelt* and *Wege zur Unsterblichkeit* at their meetings even before they had connections to the *Bund der Verheißung* (Binder 2009: 131). It was Adolf von Leonhardi (1851–1908) who introduced them in Kerning's writings. Von Leonhardi belonged to the Martinist Order and, as mentioned above, founded the Blue Star Lodge in collaboration with Meyrink and the Viennese theosophists Eckstein and Leiningen-Billigheim. He was a member of the Bohemian state parliament and of the Austrian House of Representatives. Because of his connections to

100 "Allein eine solche sichtbare Schließung der leiblichen Oeffnungen ist nicht notwendig, indem wir mit der Zunge, wenn sie einmal gehörig belebt ist, alle oben genannten Oeffnungen schließen können. Man kann auch Mund, Nase, Augen, Ohren, und beide andere Oeffnungen einzeln schließen, und hat beinahe dieselben Wirkungen."

101 Between 1812 and 1818, Kerning headed a music school in Stuttgart where teaching was based on Pestalozzi's methods.

102 "Was meinen Sie, [...] was wohl herauskommen würde, wenn man die Theologie auch auf diese Methode behandelte und dem Kandidaten, anstatt ihm mit Wörtern, Thesen und oft unverständlichen Dogmen den Kopf zu füllen, die Sache elementarisch beibrächte und von den Elementen zur Sache und zum Geist schritte?"

foreign masonic lodges and secret societies, he was under police surveillance (ibid.: 131-132).

By studying Kerning's two works, the members of the Blue Star Lodge came to the conclusion that one needs a knowledgeable guide for spiritual development, which is why they searched intensively for one (Weinfurter 1986 [1923]: 50). The Viennese theosophists Eckstein and/or Leiningen-Billigheim eventually established contact between the Blue Star Lodge and Mailänder. When it turned out that this spiritual guide was a Christian mystic, it was a cold shower for the Prague theosophists, "for we imagined that the only salvation was either in Indian mysticism or in occult practices" (ibid.: 59). At least Meyrink seriously got involved with Mailänder as a spiritual leader, although he could never really agree with his religious views.

Eckstein had access to Kerning's practices both as a student of Mailänder and from a second source. Jules Sauerwein (1880–1967) reports that Eckstein told him that he had received his knowledge of the Kerning exercises from a certain "W.," a pupil of Kerning whom he had met in Stuttgart (Sauerwein 1929: 414). This abbreviation probably stands for the building inspector "Weiß" from Stuttgart, to whom the publisher Karl Rohm (1873–1948) dedicated the new edition of Kolb's *Die Wiedergeburt* in 1905. According to Rohm, Weiß was the only pupil of Kerning still alive at the time. Rohm received Kolb's text on the letter method from Weiß to reprint it (Kolb 1935: 3-4). In the third edition of this work, Rohm mentioned that Weiß died in 1916 at the age of 93 (ibid.: 3). He may well have been an informant or even a teacher for Eckstein.

Because of his father's acquaintance with Kerning, Carl Polycarp zu Leiningen-Billigheim had special access to his teachings and writings and apparently knew more about him than was known in the Mailänder circle. In 1886, Carl Wenzeslaus wrote in a letter to Hübbe-Schleiden that he had received meditation instructions from Kerning himself. As he remarks: "The teaching itself becomes clearer to the student when he receives it, like me, from the master himself as his own property, rather than when it is only transmitted by third or fourth explanation or unclear manuscripts"¹⁰³ (Leiningen-Billigheim 1886). The description of the exercises that he adds to this remark includes the full spectrum of Kerning's language-based methods:

His rules of speaking with God seemed to me at that time to be as simple as calculating and writing; the art consists in the skill of recognising and recording numbers and letters; everything else is "practice," that is how it is with the

103 "Die Lehre selbst wird dem Schüler eher klar, wenn er sie, wie ich, von dem Meister selbst als Eigentum erhält, als wenn sie erst durch dritte oder vierte Erklärung oder undeutliche Manuscripte übertragen wird."

living “Word” of God [...]. The art consists in the dexterity of the “breath” to recognise letters, syllables, words, sentences, and concepts, to feel them and then to leave them in practice until the inner voice speaks a se, “speaks not by itself, but driven by the Holy Spirit (Leiningen-Billigheim 1886).¹⁰⁴

In 1907, Meyrink published a manuscript under the title *Kerning’s Testament* that his friend Carl Polycarp zu Leiningen-Billigheim had left to him. According to Meyrink, Carl Polycarp’s father had received the text as a gift from Kerning himself. The original title of the manuscript would have been simply *Testament*. The second section of this booklet is largely identical to the third part of the *Briefe über die königliche Kunst* (Kerning 1912: 125–141), while the first section contains some passages that correspond to statements in the *Briefe*. There are several paraphrases and additional explanations in *Kerning’s Testament* but most of them fit in well with Kerning in terms of language and content, so that it is most likely an original text slightly revised and annotated by Meyrink. Perhaps Kerning intended to publish this expanded version of the chapter from the *Briefe über die Königliche Kunst* as a separate publication.

The reception of Kerning and Mailänder by the occultists of the Habsburg Empire led to a re-evaluation of the role of the body in spiritual practice, which was well suited to the high regard for physical exercise and body awareness in the modern physical culture that was just coming into fashion in Austria. Within the theosophical paradigm of astral projection meditation was understood as separation from the physical body. In contrast to this, the incarnational spirituality of Mailänder and Kerning aimed at the permeation of the physical body with the presence of the Divine Word. His pupils were fully aware that this made a huge difference.

Master Kerning ceaselessly points to the fact that God is present *within the whole human body*. [...] Ninety-nine per cent of the occultists and Theosophists believe that human mystical development starts *within the soul*. *This view is one of the greatest mistakes of modern occult literature*. [...] Exactly the opposite is *true*. Mystical blossoming first happens *within the body*, taking

104 “Seine Regeln, mit Gott zu sprechen, erschienen mir damals so einfach als rechnen und schreiben; die Kunst besteht in der Geschicklichkeit Zahlen und Buchstaben zu erkennen und aufzuzeichnen; Alles andere ist ‘Übung’, so verhält es sich mit dem lebendigen ‘Wort’ Gottes [...]. Die Kunst besteht in der Geschicklichkeit des ‘Athems’ Buchstaben, Sylben, Worte, Sätze und Begriffe zu erkennen, zu fühlen und dann so lange in der Übung zu belassen, bis die innere Stimme a se spricht, ‘spricht nicht von selbst, sondern getrieben von dem heiligen Geiste’.” Rolf Speckner was kind enough to let me have a copy of this letter.

place in the form of body sensations that nobody knows who has not experienced them and who did not enter the mystical path (Weinfurter 1986 [1923]: 222, original emphases).¹⁰⁵

Meyrink criticised astral projection as a kind of schizophrenia and wrote about Mailänder: “If the only thing I had learnt from this man was that the body must be included in the transformation of the person through yoga, he would have earned my lifelong gratitude for that insight alone” (Meyrink 2010: 138).¹⁰⁶

Probably for the first time in the modern European history of yoga, the body-centred exercises of Haṭha Yoga were held in higher esteem than the forms of yoga primarily focused on mental exercises. In this regard, Carl Kellner’s essay on yoga is of paramount importance (Baier 2018: 411-421). Thanks to Eckstein the new focus on body awareness as yogic practice finally made its way to Sigmund Freud as one can see in his famous passage on yoga in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Civilisation and Its Discontents; 1930) (Baier 2018: 403-404).

Mailänder’s practices and his spiritual guidance certainly left a lasting impression on his pupils. Eckstein’s interest in the unorthodox fringes of Protestantism was surely strengthened by Mailänder, if not even triggered by him. For Franz Hartmann the encounter with Mailänder’s Rosicrucianism, his practices, and his spiritual counselling triggered a creative impulse that manifested itself in his works on Paracelsus, Böhme, and an English edition of the famous *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer* (Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians) that includes a theosophical comment by Hartmann. Several of his essays from this period address the deeper meaning of Christian symbols and rites. Kellner’s appreciation of Haṭha Yoga is just as inconceivable without Kerning and Mailänder as Meyrink’s concept of a spirituality of bodily metamorphosis.

105 “Meister Kerning weist unaufhörlich auf die Tatsache hin, daß Gott *im ganzen Körper* des Menschen gegenwärtig ist. [...] Neunundneunzig Prozent der Okkultisten und auch der Theosophen vermeint, dass die mystische Entwicklung beim Menschen in *der Seele* beginne! *Diese Ansicht ist einer der größten Irrtümer der modernen okkulten Literatur.* [...] Gerade das Umgekehrte ist das *Richtige*. Die mystische Entfaltung geschieht zu *Anfang im Körper*, vollzieht sich in körperlichen Empfindungen, die aber solcher Art und solchen Charakters sind, daß niemand sie kennt, der sie nicht erlebte, der den Weg der Mystik nicht angetreten hat.”

106 “Wenn ich weiter nichts von dem Manne gelernt hätte, als das Wissen, daß der Körper in die Verwandlung des Menschen einbezogen werden müsse, wäre ich ihm schon dieser Erkenntnis wegen zu Dank fürs ganze Leben verpflichtet” (Meyrink 1981: 229).

7. Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude with a few prospects for future research in the field of Viennese and Austrian occultism and related currents. Mailänder's *Bund der Verheißung*, its significance for Viennese and Prague occultism, and its connection to Kerning have not been sufficiently researched so far. A critical review of all available materials and the tracing of previously undiscovered or neglected documents would certainly provide new insights. The same holds true for J. B. Kerning and his school. Compared with Mailänder and his *Bund*, there are more written materials available in the case of Kerning and his followers, but this field too has hardly been comprehensively studied.

As I have indicated above, the currents of occult Viennese Modernism continue after the First World War. Some of them, such as parapsychology, are almost flourishing. There is still far too little historical research into the history of Viennese parapsychology with interesting authors like Ubald Tartaruga (1875–1941/42) and the *Wiener Parapsychische Bibliothek* (Viennese Parapsychical Library), a series of writings of the Viennese Parapsychical Institute published by the German Johannes Baum Verlag. The same holds true for the various theosophical associations of Vienna.

With regard to Ariosophy and its activities in Vienna, Austria, Germany, and Hungary before and after the First World War, not much has been done since the seminal works of Goodrick-Clarke. Especially its history after the Second World War and the reception of ariosophical ideas in the late twentieth century would need more attention in view of the contemporary right-wing extremist tendencies. Additionally, new insights could be provided with respect to Ariosophy and Theosophy from around 1900 onwards by targeted investigations in the *Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv* (Vienna City and Provincial Archives), the archives of the *Wienbibliothek* (Vienna Library), and the *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv* (Austrian State Archive).

Likewise, occult spaces of Austria outside Vienna—which, for example, existed in Linz or Graz—and their connections should be examined more closely. In this context, studies on outstanding occultists such as Gustav Wilhelm Geßmann (G. Manetho; 1860–1924) (Holzweber 2020: 299–300) and Demeter Georgievitz-Weitzer (G. W. Surya; 1873–1949) (Farkas 2020: 157–158) would be urgently needed.

With regard to Austrian spiritism and spiritualism a good starting point for further research would be a thorough exploration of the works and activities of Hellenbach and Adelma von Vay and the study of the links of both authors with the spiritist and spiritualist currents in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian crown lands.

In my research I have not encountered any Austrian manifestations of the New Thought movement. But they certainly existed, especially in the inter-war period. That a knowledge of this movement existed can be seen from the fact that, after the First World War, Bertha Eckstein-Diener translated Prentice Mulford (1834–1891) into German, and Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) in his book *Heilung durch den Geist* (Healing through the Mind; 1931) treated Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910) in addition to Mesmer and Freud.

Finally, I would like to point out persons and movements that built a bridge between the period of occult Viennese Modernism and the later twentieth century and that should also be examined more intensively.

Susanne Schmida (1894–1981) was a philosopher, life reformer, dancer, and esotericist who received her philosophical doctorate in 1919 from the University of Vienna with a dissertation on Nietzsche (Baatz 1997; Pichler 2018). She founded the *Bund für Neue Lebensform* (Alliance for Life Reform), and in 1934 a school of this association that exists till today as *Institut Dr. Schmida*. Her four-volume philosophical main work, *Perspektiven des Seins* (Perspectives of Being), was published between 1968 and 1976. She developed a theory of archetypes based on the philosophy of levels of consciousness of her teacher, the Austrian philosopher Robert Reininger (1869–1955). This theory was the basis of her philosophical teachings as well as of the meditation exercises and rituals of her school. The published and unpublished writings of Schmida and the activities of her institute have not yet been sufficiently researched.

The philosopher Arnold Keyserling (1922–2005) and his wife Wilhelmine, née Auersperg (1921–2010), who worked as a yoga teacher and art therapist as well as co-author of several of her husband's writings, also gave Vienna a very special occult flair after the Second World War. Arnold's father, Hermann Keyserling (1880–1946), was a well-known philosopher who was first influenced by Theosophy, then by New Thought, and founded the *Schule der Weisheit* (School of Wisdom) in Darmstadt. In 1949, Arnold Keyserling met Georges I. Gurdjeff (1855–1949) in Paris. He later referred to him as his teacher and published his writings in German. From 1964 onwards, Arnold Keyserling taught at the *Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst* (University of Applied Arts) in Vienna. Between 1979 and 1984, he was the president of the European Association for Humanistic Psychology. He published many books and the magazine *Pleroma* and founded the *Schule des Rades* (School of the Wheel) and the study circle *Kriterion*. Academic studies of his oeuvre are still lacking.

Last but not least, the *Hans Kayser Institut für harmonikale Grundlagenforschung* (Hans Kayser Institute for Fundamental Harmonic Research) at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna has to be mentioned here.

It was founded in 1967 by Rudolf Haase (1920–2013) and later directed by Werner Schulze (b. 1952). In 2002, it was transformed into the *Internationales Harmonik-Zentrum* (International Centre of Harmonics) and existed under this name until 2014. The research of this academic institution was based on the work of Hans Kayser (1891–1964), the German founder of modern harmonics that ties in with the Pythagorean harmonic tradition and its assumption of a universal harmony (*harmonia mundi*; *Harmonie der Sphären*) that manifests itself in correspondences between musical intervals, numbers, and proportions within nature. Both the institute and the centre were dedicated to the historical research of harmonic thought and to the attempt to renew it. As this tradition is also important for occultism and the New Age movement, the institute was a unique institution located at the interface between these currents and university research. Needless to say that it has not yet received the attention of religious and cultural studies it deserves.

I hope that my paper and the brief concluding remarks have made it clear that occult Vienna with its many historical variations and cultural surroundings is a worthwhile field of research that has been far from being sufficiently investigated.

Appendix

The illustrations of the two newspaper advertisements (Figure 1 and Figure 4) are based on screenshots taken by the author. The newspapers in question are freely accessible in *ANNO*, the digitised newspaper and journal reading room of the Austrian National Library.



Figure 1: Advertisement in *Deutsches Volksblatt* of May 9, 1897, p. 24.



Figure 2: Adelma of Vay (1869). Source: Vay 1935.



Figure 3: Lazar von Hellenbach (around 1882). Source: Hellenbach 1898 [1882].

Salon moderner Wunder.
I., Kolowratring 7.
 Täglich Abends halb 8 Uhr: Sensationelle
 Vorstellung
 von
Homes, Fey u. Davenport.

Licht mehr Licht!
Sensations-Magie
G. HOMES

Schutz-Marke.
Sensitiv gezeichnet.

Neue räthelhafte, unergründliche, hier noch nie gezeigte Experimente des Occultismus, Somnambulismus, Psychologie, Fernwirkung, Anamnestik und Spiritismus.

Der Geisterspuk von Resau, Möd-
ling u. Brunocz.
Das Riech- u. Sehmedium.

Sperrsitze 4, 3, 2 und 1 Krone. Billets von 10 Uhr Früh den ganzen Tag im Vorstellungslocale, Kolowratring Nr. 7.

Jeden Sonn- und Feiertag 2 Vorstellungen, um 4 Uhr und halb 8 Uhr.

Wegen Privatvorstellung Auskunft im Vorstellungslocale.

Figure 4: Advertisement from the journal *Sport und Salon*, April 5, 1900, p. 24.



Figure 5: Marie Lang (photo taken between 1901 and 1913). Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lang_Marie.jpg (accessed: February 5, 2020).



Figure 6: Friedrich Eckstein, drawn by Marianne Speckner-Clement. Source: The drawing was kindly provided by Rolf Speckner and Marianne Klement-Speckner.

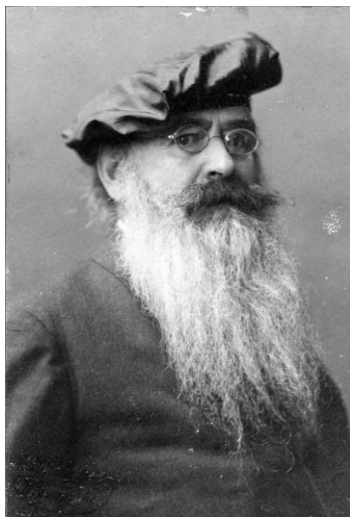


Figure 7: Guido List (1910). Source: Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-2007-0705-500. Photographed by Conrad H. Schiffer.



Figure 8: Adolf Josef Lanz (c. 1930). Source: Plate 1 from the 1994 edition of Daim 1958, photographed by Daniel Nösler.

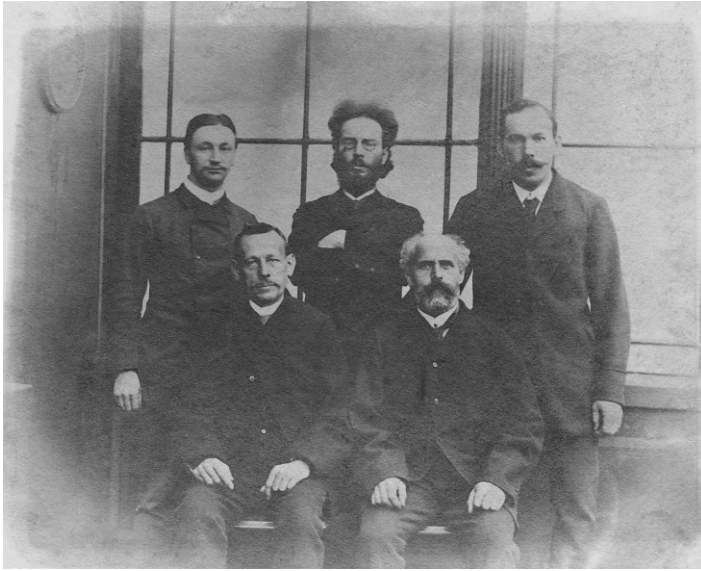


Figure 9: Sitting (from left to right): Alois Mailänder and Wilhelm Hübbschleiden. Standing (from left to right): Arthur Gebhard, Friedrich Eckstein, Nikolaus Gabele (March 1890). Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mailaender.jpg> (accessed: February 5, 2020).

List of Abbreviations

NS	National Socialist
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
ONT	<i>Ordo Novi Templi</i> (Order of the New Temple)
SPÖ	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs</i> (Social Democratic Party of Austria)
TS	Theosophical Society
US	United States

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